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Friendlyville

by

Kevin Drzakowski

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Friendlyville

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CHARACTERS:

OLD MAN ELLISON; *60's to 70's, The Retiree*

JAKE ROBERSTON; *20'S, The Florist*

BERNIE MATHESON; *30's to 40's, The Barber*

LINDA ANDERSON; *30's to 40's, The Shopkeeper*

OFFICER MANDY JOHNSON; *Female 30's, The Police Officer*

GIGGLES THE CLOWN; *20's, A Young Man*

MAYOR QUINTON P. DINKERSON; *40's, The Mayor*

KELLY NEILSON; *Late Teens to 20's, The Waitress*

CLAIRE MASTERSON; *Female 20's to 40's, The Undertaker*

EXTRAS;

VOICES OF GIGGLES SR., A BOY and A FATHER

SETTING:

A picturesque city walk. The walk brings to mind the illusion of the perfect 1950's Main Street. A row of buildings lined together stretches across the upstage area, extending off into the wings in both directions. On the stage right side is a building with the words "Barber Shop" painted largely in the window. A well-trimmed hedge is beneath the window. An old-fashioned barbershop pole spins outside the shop's door. A tall white picket fence with a gate connects the barbershop and the next building, which is a drugstore. The top of a phone booth is just barely noticeable behind the fence. A large sign over the door of the drugstore reads "Anderson's Drug Emporium." In front of the store is a bench. Above the Barber Shop and the drugstore are the windows of second story apartments. The next building, connected directly to the drugstore, is a restaurant with a large outdoor terrace. Two tables with umbrella tops are on the terrace.

FRIENDLYVILLE

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ACT ONE

SCENE 1

(AT RISE: An elderly man, OLD MAN ELLISON, sits on the bench. He holds an open newspaper in front of him, completely hiding his face from view. Just after the lights rise, a rolled up newspaper falls from the sky, landing at ELLISON'S feet. He crumples up the first newspaper and throws it behind him over the fence. ELLISON then unrolls his new newspaper and hides himself behind it. A piercing scream is heard from the barber shop. The scream belongs to JAKE ROBERTSON, the local florist.)

JAKE (O.S.)

MY EAR! YOU CUT MY EAR OFF!

(The voice of the barber, BERNIE MATHESON, answers him.)

BERNIE (O.S.)

Oh my, not again. Well hold still. Let's see what we can do about that.

(JAKE enters from the barber shop, clutching the right side of his head.)

JAKE

I said just a little off the top!

(BERNIE follows him out with a bloody pair of shears, snipping them constantly at nothing.)

BERNIE

Well you never defined "little," Jake. See, some people have different ideas about what "a little off the top" means. For some folks, that's just a bang trim. Others, well, they don't even want you to touch their bangs at all. They just want a little of the shag out. It's all relative, Jake. You can't expect me to read everyone's mind.

JAKE

But does anyone ever want you to cut their ear off? Bernie, it's my ear! I need it to hear!

BERNIE

Oh, you only need one ear, Jake. Everyone knows the second one's just for show.

JAKE

What?

BERNIE

It's just for show!

JAKE

Best of show?

BERNIE

Pardon?

JAKE

How am I supposed to sell flowers with one ear, Bernie? I'll never be able to hear the flowers! And what about the deliveries? A florist has to look sharp when he's making a delivery. When Jeff Bradson calls me and asks me to deliver a bouquet of roses to Kelly Neilson, what's Kelly going to think about Jeff when she gets her roses delivered to her by a guy who's missing his ear?

BERNIE

Well I don't know, Jake. That Kelly Neilson, though...woo. She's about as pretty as them flowers she's going to get, I can tell you that right now.

*(JAKE runs back into the barber shop.
BERNIE stares into the clouds.)*

About time Jeff sent her some roses, I agree with you there.

(BERNIE thrusts his bloody shears forward like a sword and makes some impressive practice cuts. He then looks over at the hedge, deciding it could use a trim. Using the shears, he attempts to manicure it. BERNIE carefully ponders each cut, pausing to step back and admire his work. On his fourth cut, he takes a bit too large of a chunk off.)

Oh no! My hedge!

(He lifts up the chunk he has cut off and stares at it, horrified.)

What have I done?

(JAKE returns, still clutching the right side of his head. He holds a small mirror in his left hand.)

JAKE

I'm hideous, Bernie. Look at me, I'm hideous!

(BERNIE looks at him.)

DON'T LOOK AT ME!

BERNIE

I was just trying to give it a little trim, but I guess I got a little carried away with myself.

(He bends down, clearly talking about the hedge. JAKE keeps looking into the mirror.)

JAKE

A little carried away?

BERNIE

Now it looks all uneven.

JAKE

Of course it's uneven! I only have one ear!

(BERNIE runs his hand along the hedge.)

BERNIE

We'll have to get an entirely new one.

JAKE

A new one? What...can't we just reuse the old one?

BERNIE

I'm afraid that's just not going to work out, Jake. I've mangled this one up way too much. We could try and try to make things look even, but then we'd just end up cutting both sides down more and more until we were down to practically nothing.

JAKE

(Looking in the mirror) What?

BERNIE

Yep, we'll have to get ourselves a whole new one.

JAKE

But how do we go about doing something like that?

BERNIE

Well, I figure you can help me out on this one, Jake.

JAKE

Me?

BERNIE

Sure, you're a florist. I'm sure you've got connections with the right people. I trust you'd be able to pick me up something like this. I'd even give you a free shave.

JAKE

Connections...with the right people...just because I'm a florist?

BERNIE

Well, I know it's not exactly your department. But if you wouldn't mind helping out, I'd be much obliged. Just do your best to make sure it looks like the old one. Same size and color and everything.

JAKE

I guess...maybe...I might know someone who can get one.

BERNIE

Thanks, Jake. Knew I could count on you.

(JAKE nods and hands BERNIE the mirror.)

JAKE

OK Bernie, well...I guess I'll get, um...I'll get right on that.

BERNIE

'Preciate it, Jake. You have yourself a nice day now. Looks like it's going to be a good one.

JAKE

Yep, you got it, Bern. Well, I'll be seein' ya.

(JAKE hurries off R.)

BERNIE

Bye, Jake.

(BERNIE starts to exit back into his shop, then stops. He calls back after JAKE.)

Jake! *(Pause)* Guess he didn't want that ear back. I'll just put it in lost and found.

(BERNIE stands in the doorway, looking in the mirror and attempting to trim his own hair with the shears. After a bit he gives up. He looks out a moment, taking in the nice morning. With a happy sigh he exits back into the barbershop. After a moment's pause, LINDA ANDERSON exits out of the drugstore, carrying a crate full of milk bottles and one whiskey bottle. She walks R, whistling, and sets a milk bottle down in front of OLD MAN ELLISON, who has been there all this time. As she sets it down, he lowers the newspaper.)

ELLISON

Well hello there, Linda.

LINDA

Hi, Old Man Ellison. I'm just delivering your milk. I wasn't sure if you were there or not.

ELLISON

Well, you know me.

LINDA

(Laughs) Oh, I know plenty of people like you. Always hiding behind current events.

ELLISON

I find it pays to keep up with what's going on. Take today, for instance. Today Bernie Matheson cut off Jake Robertson's ear. *(Shows her the newspaper)* There's a story about it right here.

(LINDA, disbelieving, takes the newspaper. She scans the article, then nods.)

LINDA

Well, how about that? You're right. That Jake, he's always getting himself into something. But I guess that's what happens when you're a florist. Danger kind of comes with the job description.

(She gives the paper back to ELLISON, then picks up her milk crate.)

Well, Old Man Ellison, I have to get going. I have a lot of deliveries to make.

(She picks up the bottle that she first put in front of ELLISON and also puts it in her crate.)

I'll be seeing you. Hope you enjoy the news.

(She sets the whiskey bottle from her crate in front of the barber shop, then starts off R.)

ELLISON

Have a good one, Linda. *(Looks at his newspaper)* Hope you enjoy your extramarital affair.

LINDA

(Stopping in her tracks) What? Who told you about that?

ELLISON

Well it's right here in the paper under "current affairs."

LINDA

Oh, you've gotta be kidding me!

(LINDA comes behind the bench to look over ELLISON's shoulder.)

That Elmer Samson! When I called the paper to report this, I specifically told him it was a private affair! Can't that man get anything right?

ELLISON

Well it says it's private right here.

LINDA

It does?

ELLISON

Sure, see? *(Reading)* “Mrs. Linda Anderson and Mayor Quinton P. Dinkerson are currently in the third week of their affair, extramarital for both parties. The two plan to continue the affair this evening in the apartment above Anderson’s Drug Emporium while Mr. Anderson is out on business. Note: This is a private affair.”

LINDA

Oh, that’s a relief. I was afraid everyone in town was going to find out. Elmer makes so many mistakes with the paper, you know. Why, just the other day I was going through it and I found two places where the possessive form of “its” had an apostrophe. A newspaper man should be someone we can all trust, don’t you think?

(ELLISON suddenly becomes extremely serious.)

ELLISON

Oh Linda, I don’t know...that’s a rather heavy statement to make.

LINDA

(Defensively) Well sure, it is Elmer’s newspaper, and I don’t want to question what he does with it. After all, Elmer was put on this earth to be an editor, and if that’s what was intended for him I don’t want to argue.

ELLISON

Oh, I know you weren’t arguing, I was just saying...

LINDA

(Abruptly) Well I wasn’t! Elmer’s the editor of the paper, that’s the way it is, that’s the way it was, and that’s the way it’s gonna be! And I don’t have a problem with that!

ELLISON

No one said you did, Linda...no one said anything.

(ELLISON brings the newspaper back up in front of his face. LINDA takes a breath to say something, then stops herself. BERNIE comes back out of the barber shop and cuts LINDA off as she starts out R.)

BERNIE

Everything OK out here, Linda? I heard you yelling.

(He snips his shears.)

LINDA

No, Bernie, everything’s fine. I was just talking with Old Man Ellison here.

BERNIE

Sounded mighty loud for just talking.

(BERNIE grabs the whiskey bottle and puts it in his apron pocket.)

LINDA

But that's all it was...just us talking. Right, Old Man Ellison?

(ELLISON makes no move.)

BERNIE

Looks like he's gone.

(A shrill whistle is blown offstage, then OFFICER MANDY JOHNSON comes striding on from R. She places herself between BERNIE and LINDA, then blows the whistle again.)

MANDY

All right, what's all the commotion here?

LINDA

Nothing. There's no commotion, Mandy.

MANDY

(Blowing her whistle) Linda Anderson! I am an officer of the law, and I will not tolerate this degree of inappropriate familiarity when I am on duty! You will refer to me as Officer Johnson!

LINDA

Sorry, Officer Johnson.

MANDY

Now I repeat, what's going on around here? At approximately...What time is it?

BERNIE

(Checking his watch) 9:32.

MANDY

At approximately 9:31 this morning, shouting was heard emanating from this general vicinity. Several minutes earlier, screaming was also reported to be coming from the barber shop, although that is a routine occurrence and was ignored by this officer. *(Looks at BERNIE)* Now please fill me in on the details of the 9:31 shouting.

LINDA

There are no details...

MANDY

The question is directed to the barber!

LINDA

(Flustered) But...it wasn't even a question!

MANDY

You will not question my authority to designate imperative commands as questions when I deem appropriate! Bernie, please answer the imperative.

BERNIE

Well, Officer Johnson, I was just in my shop cleaning up my shears...

(MANDY clubs him in the knee with her baton.)

MANDY

Bernie Matheson, in order to keep a degree of warmth in this conversation, you will refer to me as Mandy.

BERNIE

(In a little pain) Whatever you say, Mandy. Anyhow, I was just in my shop when I heard Linda shout outside here. I came out as quick as I could.

MANDY

Was there anyone else on the street at the time of the alleged shouting?

BERNIE

Well, I didn't see anybody, but Linda claims she was talking with Old Man Ellison.

MANDY

Linda, confirmation or denial?

LINDA

Yes, I was talking with Old Man Ellison.

MANDY

Well, Linda, if you were talking with Old Man Ellison, then why didn't the barber see him?

LINDA

He was behind his newspaper!

MANDY

I see. *(Walks to bench)* And this alleged newspaper you are referring to, is this the same newspaper that is currently in this area and that I am looking at right now?

LINDA

Yes, Officer Johnson.

MANDY

Hmmm. Well Linda, knowing you on a personal level as I do, I'm apt to believe your story thus far. But the reason for the shouting has yet to be determined.

LINDA

Old Man Ellison and I were just having a conversation. I guess I got a little excited and maybe shouted a bit.

MANDY

Was the shouting threatening in nature?

LINDA

No.

MANDY

I see. Since there were no other witnesses, I can only ask Old Man Ellison for confirmation or denial of your denial that the shout was threatening in nature. If confirmation is given, you are free to go. If denial is given, you will be wanted for further questioning. In the meantime, however, since Old Man Ellison is not around I will let you off on probationary status until further inquiries in this case can be made. The two of you are dismissed.

LINDA

Thanks, Officer Johnson.

BERNIE

Yes, thank you Officer Johnson.

(MANDY blows her whistle, then clubs him in the leg.)

LINDA

Mandy! He means Mandy!

(MANDY blows the whistle at LINDA.)

I wasn't calling you Mandy! I was only correcting what he said. You were never directly addressed.

(MANDY contemplates this for a moment. Unsure, she gives a small half-whistle then turns to exit R. She runs into GIGGLES THE CLOWN, a sad-looking young man in full clown makeup, as he trudges on sadly from R.)

MANDY

Watch it, clown.

GIGGLES

Sorry.

MANDY

Bumping into an officer of the law is an offense punishable by reprimand.

GIGGLES

I said I was sorry.

MANDY

Sorry doesn't cut it in Friendlyville.

GIGGLES

It never has, has it?

MANDY

I don't like your insolent tone, clown.

LINDA

Wait a minute...that's Giggles! Giggles the Clown!

BERNIE

Giggles the Clown! I haven't seen you since...oh, since the last time you came in for a wig dye. That was years ago.

GIGGLES

(Distantly) Yep...it's been a while.

LINDA

You were off at Clown College, weren't you?

GIGGLES

(Nodding blankly) Hardy-Har-Harvard Clown College.

LINDA

Well I hope they got you straightened out over there. You were a terrible clown growing up. I don't think you ever made me laugh once.

BERNIE

Well, you can't blame him for that. Clownin's not the sort of thing that comes easy, mind you. Not that I know, of course. But I do hear a lot, being a barber and all.

LINDA

I guess I did laugh that one time you fell off your unicycle on the high wire without a safety net. *(Starts to laugh)* Ohhh, that was great.

BERNIE

I remember that! Made a great big crunching noise, just like a good breakfast cereal.

LINDA

Your father, Giggles Sr...now that man was a clown! He always had something up his sleeve. Like a sucker, or a balloon, or a new car, or a weasel...something to always keep a smile on your face. Why I remember that one time he was standing right up there in that apartment above Bernie's shop... *(Gestures to apartment)*...and he threw fake vomit down on Mayor Dinkerson. I laughed so hard I wet the bed for weeks.

GIGGLES

You thought it was fake?

BERNIE

(Lost in his own world) All the cereals they make get so soggy now. Dang flakes suck everything up.

(ELLISON peers over his newspaper.)

ELLISON

Back in my day, cereal was just a bowl of rocks and some milk. Now that had some crunch to it!

MANDY

Old Man Ellison, I have to talk to you!

(ELLISON ducks behind the newspaper.)

Gone! He's a quick one.

LINDA

Giggles Sr. was quick, too. Lighting quick with a pun, that clown. He always had some witty saying ready to throw into the conversation.

MANDY

(Looking at GIGGLES) Wait, a minute...

LINDA

It didn't make sense half the time, but we laughed anyway.

MANDY

...I remember you now. You were a disgrace to your father's good name. The worst clown Friendlyville ever saw. You made me sick.

GIGGLES

Well I'm sorry.

MANDY

And aren't you supposed to be talking through a bicycle horn?

LINDA

Hey, yeah...that's right. Every clown has his little quirk. Yours was supposed to be that you talked with a bicycle horn.

GIGGLES

To be honest, I got a little tired of that.

(Everyone gasps.)

MANDY

A little tired? Of your clown quirk? Well, I'm getting a little tired of your attitude. TEN DEMERITS!

GIGGLES

Demerits?

MANDY

TWENTY MORE!

BERNIE

Uh-oh, thirty. Them demerits are really pilin' up on you, Giggles. You'd better watch out. You know what happens when you get to a hundred.

GIGGLES

What?

BERNIE

Well, you've just gotten yourself into triple digits, that's what.

MANDY

Henceforth, when you desire attention or feel you have something to add to the conversation...

(MANDY exits into the drugstore. A cash register's bell is heard, then MANDY returns.)

...you will use this horn to communicate your intended message for us, the way a clown of your relatively low standing should.

(MANDY tosses the bicycle horn to GIGGLES.)

Perhaps someday, when you've proven yourself worthy of our laughter and mirth, you will be permitted to speak freely. Until then, any further verbalizations by you will result in demerits of a number which I deem appropriate. Is that understood?

GIGGLES

I don't want...

MANDY

FORTY DEMERITS! Is that understood?

GIGGLES

But...

MANDY

3.141592653 etcetera, etcetera... DEMERITS!

GIGGLES

You don't...

MANDY

6.02 TIMES 10 TO THE 23RD DEMERITS!

GIGGLES

Listen!

MANDY

NEGATIVE ONE TRILLION DEMERITS!

BERNIE

Negative one trillion? Oooh, good for you, Mr. Giggles.

GIGGLES

You people don't...

MANDY

(Extremely loud and final) INFINITE DEMERITS!

(A hushed silence follows.)

Am I understood?

(GIGGLES looks at her, then the others, sadly. He honks his bicycle horn.)

Excellent. Minus nine demerits. Linda, what's infinite minus nine?

LINDA

Umm...

(She pulls out a thick marker and writes "infinite" on the fence. She crosses out the first "n," the first "i," the second "n," and the "e.")

"Fiit."

MANDY

Very well, Giggles the Clown. You have "fiit" demerits remaining. Use them well.

(A grizzled, angry looking man wearing a rumpled suit and a cowboy hat walks on from R, MAYOR QUINTON P. DINKERSON. He speaks in a questionable southern accent which he occasionally briefly loses.)

DINKERSON

Lawd-a-lawdy have a mercy-mercy, what in the nation of tar is goin' on over here?

MANDY

All rise in the presence of Mayor Quinton P. Dinkerson!

(Everyone except for DINKERSON crams together on ELLISON's bench. All except for ELLISON then rise.)

DINKERSON

Ah've been hearin' all kinds of commotion of the highest of levels from over here yonder. What the high hell you people tryin' tah do, play a solo on mah eardrums?

MANDY

Sorry, Mayor. I've been handing out demerits.

BERNIE

Yeah...Officer Johnson's had her hands full...

(MANDY blows her whistle. DINKERSON screams.)

MANDY

Bernie! You've been warned, you are to refer to me as...

DINKERSON

Son of a biscuit, woman! Don't ever blow that damn thang again. Honestly, ya'd think we wuz trained dogs or somethin'.

MANDY

Sorry Mayor. You're right.

(She throws the whistle off R. BERNIE, excited, chases after it and brings it back to MANDY.)

DINKERSON

Aw, fer hell's sake Bernie, quit actin' like the mo-ron that you are and give me mah usual.

BERNIE

Sure thing, Mayor Dinkerson. We'll get you all ready for tonight.

LINDA

Make sure you give him a close shave, Bernie. I hate it when his beard scratches me.

(GIGGLES sadly honks his horn. MAYOR DINKERSON reacts with horror.)

DINKERSON

No...NO! It can't be! That clown! But...yer dead! Ah saw it mahself! *(Looks up)*
Oh, sweet Lawd, Ah cain't take no vomit right now. Not on mah new hat.

LINDA

Oh, that's not Giggles Sr., Quinton.

DINKERSON

(Quickly reacting, getting red with both anger and embarrassment) What did Ah tell you 'bout callin' me Quinton in public? Ah am Mayor Dinkerson.

LINDA

Sorry, Dinkie.

(DINKERSON sputters incoherently, pointing at LINDA. Finally, he manages to make some sense.)

DINKERSON

Great Caesar Salad's Ghost, Ah don't know what it takes ta' git ya' to address me in the proper degree of formality. As fer you clown, if ya' ain't that Harlequin from hell Giggles Sr., then who the hell else are ya'?

BERNIE

That's Giggles Sr.'s son, Mayor Dinkerson. Giggles Jr.

MANDY

Although when his father passed away, the suffix "junior" was dropped for convenience's sake, and his legal name became Giggles the Clown.

DINKERSON

Giggles the Clown, huh? Well, gosh dammit, don't just stand there with a painted grin on yer face. Make me laugh! Put some merriment in mah awful life, clown!

(GIGGLES honks his bicycle horn.)

That's it? Why, that's gotta be the sorriest excuse fer' clownin' Ah've ever seen! That all ya' got?

(GIGGLES honks his horn again.)

And that's supposed to be funny? Ya' honk yer blinkin' bike horn, and Ah'm supposed to clap like damn seal fer more? Come on! Put a smile on mah face! Yer here fer mah amusement, dammit!

(GIGGLES honks. DINKERSON slaps his forehead.)

Ya' just don't get it, do ya'? For the love of frilly under-garments, tell me a dirty joke or somethin'!

LINDA

He can't, Dinkie.

MANDY

Giggles the Clown is only permitted to speak with his bicycle horn.

DINKERSON

So tell me a dirty joke with the bike horn!

(GIGGLES sighs, then attempts to remember a joke. He then goes into an elaborate bit of honking, with MAYOR DINKERSON nodding in response to each series of honks.)

BERNIE

(In the middle of honking) I think I've heard this one.

(GIGGLES honks the horn more.)

LINDA

He got his head caught where?

(GIGGLES shakes his head, then honks the horn slowly, trying to get the others to understand.)

MANDY

What good is a twelve-inch peanut?

(GIGGLES, exasperated, gives a final series of honks, then turns around and bends over. He places the horn as though it was coming out of his rear end, then gives two long honks. He then gets up and appeals to the others for laughter, somewhat indifferently.)

BERNIE

I don't get it.

DINKERSON

That's because there ain't nothin' ta' get! That's gotta be the worst dirty joke Ah've heard since the one about that sexy chicken that crosses all the roads. Giggles the Clown, you disgust me! Ah want you outta mah sight!

LINDA

Don't be so hard on him, Dinkie. It's not his fault he's a bad clown.

DINKERSON

Well if he don't got no laughter ta' offer Friendlyville, then what the hell good is he?

GIGGLES

I don't want to make people laugh!

MANDY

Five thousand de...

GIGGLES

And I don't care about your stupid demerits! You can give me all the demerits in the world, and it's not going to make any difference. I hate this town. I always have.

BERNIE

Now calm down, Mr. Giggles. This is nothing a little lather and shave can't...

GIGGLES

I DON'T WANT TO BE A CLOWN!

(Shocked silence. ELLISON drops his newspaper.)

ELLISON

Don't want to be a...

GIGGLES

Clown. That's right, you heard me. I don't want to be a clown. I never wanted to be one.

LINDA

I don't believe it. He said it. He actually said it.

BERNIE

I...I think I'm going to be sick.

MANDY

You are a clown, Giggles the Clown. Regardless of how you feel about the situation, you are and will always be a clown. And that is not to be questioned.

DINKERSON

(Gravely) You've made a big mistake today, Giggles the Clown. Questioning who you are is one of the most serious offenses a person can...

(BERNIE has grabbed DINKERON'S hat off his head.)

Aw, what the hell are you doin'?

(BERNIE vomits into the hat.)

Mah hat! Mah new hat!

BERNIE

Oh no! Mayor Dinkerson, I apologize!

(BERNIE vomits into the hat again.)

DINKERSON

(Wheeling around to face GIGGLES) You! You'll pay fer this! If ya' slip up again, Ah mean the tiniest little error, Ah guaran-goshdamn-tee the only clownin' you'll be doin' is from yer coffin. Mandy, make a note of that.

MANDY

(Writing on her notepad) Understood, Mayor. If Giggles the Clown in any way fails to meet any unspecified expectations, he will be killed onsite.

DINKERSON

(As he exits R) Ah hate a lot of people, clown. But Ah hate you most of all.

(BERNIE snips his large shears at GIGGLES.)

BERNIE

Now I'm generally a nice person, Mr. Giggles, but when people do things that get me into trouble with high-ranking officials, well... *(Snips his shears)*...sometimes a self-respecting man has to take action. I'm sure you understand.

(BERNIE exits, chasing after DINKERSON.)

BERNIE *(O.S.)*

Mayor Dinkerson, your hat!

DINKERSON *(O.S.)*

Dammit, don't put that on mah head now!

MANDY

(To GIGGLES) The eyes of the law are on you. Remember, one slip-up, and...

(MANDY blows her whistle at GIGGLES, letting the shrill whistle slowly die away to nothing. She then turns and exits R. LINDA suddenly adopts a much softer demeanor.)

LINDA

Giggles...I'm sorry.

(GIGGLES regards her suspiciously.)

I am. We shouldn't be treating you like this. I'm sure it's hard to be clown. All that pressure, people always expecting you to make them laugh. It's not fair. I know that. And, even though it doesn't always seem like it, I just want you to know that the people of Friendlyville, well...we really appreciate what you do. Especially me. Come here...

*(She holds out her arms for a hug.
GIGGLES looks reluctant.)*

Come on, it's OK. Please.

(GIGGLES looks ready to cry. He walks over to her, ready to accept the hug, but LINDA steps to the side and trips him up so he falls on the ground. She howls in laughter.)

Ohhhh. I love clowns!

(LINDA gives GIGGLES a kick in the butt, then happily exits into the drugstore. GIGGLES, still on the ground, looks up at OLD MAN ELLISON.)

ELLISON

Wish I could help you, son. Wish I could.

(ELLISON, obviously shaken, retrieves the newspaper and holds it in front of his face. GIGGLES comes down center to deliver the following "soliloquy" to the audience. During the monologue, the lights should gradually change from a daytime lighting into night.)

GIGGLES

To be or not to be a clown's the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The pies and seltzer of hilarious slapstick,
Or to say no to a life of laughter,
And by refusing, end it. Throw pies, lose sleep—
No way. To lose these goofy feet I'd end
My heartache and the thousand handshake shocks
My flesh is prone to. 'Tis determination!
But really just a wish. I sigh...to sweep.

(He grabs a broom which is leaning against the fence.)

To sweep, perchance to clean. I...I can rub.

(He uses a scarf he pulls out to rub down ELLISON'S bench.)

To be a janitor. What dreams may come
When I have shuffled off this stupid wig...
It makes me pause. There'd be respect in that.
To lose calamity of the clowning life,
For who would wear the wig and nose of clowns,
Th'oppressor's wrong, the circus man's costume,
The pains of despised mirth, the clown's array,
The insolence of children, little brats,
And get no merit for the work it takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare noggin? Who would this bike horn bear,
To squeeze and honk under a silent life.
But that the dread of townsfolk crying death,
The undiscovered big top from whose ring
No Harlequin returns, puzzles the will,
And makes me rather wear this clown makeup
Than the makeup of the undertaker.
Thus conscience does make a clown of me yet,
And thus the native hue of sickly white
Is sicklied o'er with the streaks of red.
And all these noses of great girth and redness
With no regard all fragrants turn away.

(OLD MAN ELLISON starts crying softly.)

I've lost my train of thought. Oh soft you, now,
Old Man Ellison—Safe, behind thy paper,
You know not how you're envied.

(ELLISON quiets. GIGGLES slumps onto the bench on the right side of ELLISON, staring out blankly. KELLY NEILSON, a young waitress, emerges from the restaurant, wearing an apron. She happily throws it off.)

KELLY

Another day. God, I hate this place.

(She is startled to see someone besides ELLISON on the bench. The fear in her face quickly melts into relief, then happiness. KELLY runs over to the bench, delighted.)

Giggles the Clown! You're back! Oh, it's good to see you!

(GIGGLES honks his bicycle horn.)

Giggles, come on. You know you don't have to use that thing when you're around me.

GIGGLES

Thank God. *(Puts horn away)* It's good to see you too, Kelly.

KELLY

How was Clown College? I didn't think you'd be back so quickly.

GIGGLES

I left.

KELLY

You left?

GIGGLES

I dropped out.

KELLY

Of clown college?

GIGGLES

I couldn't hack it, Kelly. I just couldn't.

KELLY

Oh, Giggles...I'm so sorry.

GIGGLES

Yeah...I am too.

(After a small pause, KELLY gestures to the bench.)

KELLY

Is this seat taken?

No. GIGGLES

Do you mind if I sit down, then? KELLY

I don't mind. GIGGLES

*(KELLY sits on the left side of ELLISON.
Both she and GIGGLES ignore him
completely.)*

So what happened at Clown College? Do you want to talk about it? KELLY

No. GIGGLES

You might feel better if you did. KELLY

Probably. GIGGLES

You know you can trust me, right Giggles? KELLY

I know. *(Pause)* I think so. Kelly...I wasn't meant to be a clown. GIGGLES

What do you mean? I mean...you are a clown. You're Giggles the Clown. That's your name. It's who you are. KELLY

But it's not who I want to be. That's what I realized at Clown College. I could never be a clown. Never. GIGGLES

Why not? KELLY

I don't like making people laugh. That's something I've come to realize about myself. GIGGLES

KELLY

While you were at Clown College?

GIGGLES

(Shaking his head) No...I've always had that feeling. Long before I ever went to Clown College, I knew I didn't want to be a clown.

KELLY

But...everybody loves a clown.

GIGGLES

Not me. I'm scared of them, Kelly. I'm scared to death of clowns.

(A long pause ensues. KELLY wants to say something, but she can't come up with anything.)

Do you know what it's like, Kelly? Do you have any idea what it feels like, to look in the mirror each day and see the thing that scares you the most in the world staring back at you? You don't, do you?

KELLY

(Apologetically) No. I'm pretty.

GIGGLES

It's horrible. I have nightmares about clowns. I wake up screaming. Then I touch my face...I feel the big nose, the curly wig, all the makeup...and I cry.

KELLY

Giggles...

GIGGLES

My father was a clown. My father's father was a clown. All their fathers before them were clowns. And I was scared of every one of them...especially my father.

KELLY

But...everyone loved your father. He came to my fifth birthday party and put on a magic show. *(Smiles)* It was so much fun. He pulled a rabbit out of my Uncle Walter's pants.

GIGGLES

Yeah, I know my father seemed like a really nice guy...

KELLY

Uncle Walter had been complaining about that rabbit for weeks.

GIGGLES

Kelly, my father was a very different person than you knew...a very different...clown.

KELLY

What do you mean?

GIGGLES

One time, he asked me if I wanted a balloon puppy. When I said yes, he handed me my own real puppy, Skippers...twisted and contorted beyond recognition.

(KELLY gasps.)

I can still remember those nights when he would come home after working a late party...it was terrible.

(GIGGLES stands up from the bench and walks to the front of the stage. All lights go down except for a red spotlight on GIGGLES. Horrible-sounding clown music plays softly during the following exchange. GIGGLES plays himself as a ten year-old child. The lines spoken by GIGGLES SR. are delivered as voiceover sound cues.)

GIGGLES SR. (V.O.)

(Speaking in an absolutely horrific clown voice) Honey, I'm hooooooooooooome!

(A loud crash is heard.)

Whoops! Looks like I took a little nasty little fall, there. Well hi there, Giggles! Why don't you come over here and smell my new flower.

GIGGLES

That's OK, Dad.

GIGGLES SR. (V.O.)

Oh, come on. It's right here in my buttonhole and it's really fragrant!

GIGGLES

I don't want to.

GIGGLES SR. (V.O.)

Damn it Giggles, you get over here and you smell my new flower!

(GIGGLES reluctantly takes a few steps L and pretends to sniff a flower. He then

reacts as though he is being sprayed in the face by water. GIGGLES SR. laughs maniacally.)

Oh, you got a little sprayed there, son. Whoops! Betcha didn't see that one comin'.

GIGGLES

(Wiping his eyes) No, Dad. I didn't.

GIGGLES SR. *(V.O.)*

Now where's that mother of yours?

GIGGLES

She said she was going out.

GIGGLES SR. *(V.O.)*

Again? She's always out.

GIGGLES

She said she was leaving dinner on the table.

GIGGLES SR. *(V.O.)*

Oh she did, did she? Hey, would you look at that! Look what's for dessert! Cream pies!

GIGGLES

I...I think she wanted us to eat them.

GIGGLES SR. *(V.O.)*

Well of course I'm going to eat them! What else would I do with a pie? In fact, they look so good, I think I'll have one right now!

GIGGLES

Please Dad, don't...

GIGGLES SR. *(V.O.)*

Uh-oh! These sure are tough to hang onto! Whoops!

(A large SPLAT is heard, and GIGGLES reacts as though he has just been hit in the face by a pie. He wipes away both the pie cream and the tears from his eyes.)

Well, I guess I'll just have to try another. Oh no, not again!

(Another SPLAT occurs. GIGGLES is knocked back by the force of the throw. The

*SPLATS keep coming over the sound of
GIGGLES SR.'s demonic laughter.)*

GIGGLES

(Crying) Please, Dad! Stop! Please...stop!

*(GIGGLES falls to his knees, still being hit
by the imaginary pies. The sound of
GIGGLES SR.'s laughing and the
pies slowly fades, along with the red light,
as the normal lights come up. GIGGLES
gets up and returns to his seat on the bench.)*

KELLY

Oh, Giggles...I had no idea.

GIGGLES

My father died when I was twelve.

KELLY

I know. We all heard about it.

GIGGLES

I was there. I saw him get into that little car, then all those other clowns get in after him. *(Looking down)* They just kept piling in...there were too many of them. I could see it happening, but I didn't say anything. I went out with everyone else into the audience, and when the car pulled up clown after clown came tumbling out of the car. Except for my father. He never got out.

KELLY

Giggles...I'm sorry.

GIGGLES

To this day, I can still hear his voice in my head. Telling me I'll never make it as a clown. Laughing that horrible laugh of his. Telling me he's going to ship me off to the rodeo, where all the hopeless clowns go.

KELLY

I really don't know what to say.

GIGGLES

I didn't mean to lay all of this on you.

KELLY

Giggles...

(She reaches across ELLISON to grab GIGGLES'S hands.)

...I understand exactly what you're going through. I don't want to be a waitress wanting to be an actress... *(Hushed)* ...I want to be a waitress wanting to be a dancer!

(GIGGLES smiles.)

If you need anything, Giggles, anything at all, I'll help you out. I'm here for you. Do you want to go get some pie or something? Pie always cheers me up.

GIGGLES

Thanks, but I think I'll just sit here for a little bit. I need to be alone for a while.

KELLY

(Rising) I understand. Goodnight, Giggles.

(KELLY exits L. After she is gone, Giggles sighs, then slowly squeaks his bike horn so it sounds like a sad moan.)

GIGGLES

Why am I here?

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: The following morning. OLD MAN ELLISON is hidden behind his paper. A new paper falls from the sky. ELLISON crumples up the old one and throws it behind the fence as he did before. He then unrolls and examines the new newspaper.)

ELLISON

Well, let's check the ol' obituaries.

(He scans the paper, then heaves a sigh of relief and smiles.)

One more day.

(Something catches his eye in the paper. He reads it, then looks over at the barber shop.)

We'll I'll be.

(BERNIE strides on from R, whistling cheerfully.)

BERNIE

Old Man Ellison, hello! How's the morning treating you?

ELLISON

Oh, you know, same ol' same ol'. Yourself?

BERNIE

Oh, you know. The same.

ELLISON

Same ol' same ol'?

BERNIE

(Nodding) Same ol' same ol'.

ELLISON

Same ol'.

BERNIE

Same ol'. *(Pause.)* See ya.

ELLISON

See ya.

(BERNIE exits into the barber shop. ELLISON checks his watch expectantly. The sound of BERNIE screaming is soon heard coming from inside. BERNIE runs back out.)

BERNIE

Old Man Ellison! Something terrible has happened!

ELLISON

I know, Bernie. I know.

BERNIE

I didn't do it! You've gotta believe me. I had nothing to do with it!

ELLISON

(Looking at the newspaper) Can't believe you just yet, Bern. Doesn't say who did it.

(BERNIE exits back into the barber shop, whimpering. He returns, pushing a rolling barber's chair out the door. In the chair sits the body of GIGGLES THE CLOWN, a pair of shears jammed into his clown wig and several streaks of red and blue running down the side of his white face. GIGGLES is still clutching his bicycle horn.)

BERNIE

Oh, Giggles. Why do the good always die so young? *(Looks at Ellison)* No offense.

ELLISON

None taken.

BERNIE

Oh no, oh no. No one's ever died in my shop before. A lot of people have come close, but never this! Old Man Ellison, what should we do?

ELLISON

There's only one thing we can do, Bernie.

(The lights suddenly go down, as if a great storm is brewing.)

Get the undertaker.

(Eerie organ music begins to play.)

BERNIE

(Stammering) Oh, but...but Mr. Ellison, I'd rather...well, I both think we'd rather...not get...you know...not that I mind or anything, but she...I think we can both agree that...nobody wants to see...

(An extremely morbid-looking woman, the undertaker, CLAIRE MASTERSON, seems to float on from L. One might think that she is a ghost. She wears a flowing black dress and carries a bouquet of black roses. A pale blue spotlight follows her as she makes a slow cross to BERNIE and ELLISON.)

...Claire.

CLAIRE

(Her eyes in the sky) Someone has died.

BERNIE

Yes...

CLAIRE

I can feel it in the air. The sorrow of a life cut short. The sorrow of passing. We must breathe it in. Breathe in the sorrow.

(She closes her eyes, buries her nose in her flowers, and inhales contentedly. She opens her eyes, as though aware of her surroundings for the first time.)

Old Man Ellison. *(Surprised)* You're alive. What a disappointment. *(Seeing GIGGLES)* But what have we here?

BERNIE

I just went into my shop and there he was...just like that. I swear I didn't have anything to do with it.

(CLAIRE runs her finger along one of the red streaks, then tastes it.)

CLAIRE

(Giggling morosely) Foul play.

ELLISON

You don't say.

CLAIRE

I do say. *(Looking at BERNIE with an evil grin)* Foul play, Herr Barber. Foul play.

BERNIE

No...I would never...Old Man Ellison, tell her.

(He appeals to ELLISON. ELLISON puts up his paper.)

CLAIRE

A dead clown. Is there anything more sad...more beautiful? Is this not everything we hope for, the work of our culture's greatest artists rendered at last in reality? When the trapeze artist does a flip, we pray for his hands to lose their grip...to slip. When the tightrope walker leans too far, the audience's breath sucks in a collective gasp. And one thousand pairs of eyes, a thousand minds, a thousand hopes and dreams gather

CLAIRE, *Continued*

together and work as one collective force to push the walker to the right, just a bit more, so that we might finally see him stumble. And fall, fall with no safety net, the sound of his body exploding on the ground drowned out only by our own thunderous applause. The lion tamer with his chair, we encourage the lion to slash through the chair with his fangs and bite off the whip-bearing arm of his tormentor. We watch the torch juggler that he might light up in flames, we watch the sword swallower that he might cut through his own intestines. Will today be the day the escape artist does not escape? Will today be the day the elephants trample the leotard-clad baton twirler? We come to gawk at the fat man, mesmerized as he slowly succumbs to diabetes. But the clowns...in the clowns, our appointed representatives of folly, vice, and comic violence...in them, our most fantastic hopes are imbedded. Giggles the Clown, your time has come. Congratulations. (*Kisses GIGGLES.*) You are dead.

(CLAIRE places one of her black roses in his lap. MAYOR DINKERSON and MANDY enter from R. The organ music fades.)

DINKERSON

What the Helen of Troy is goin' on here? What the high hell happened to mah beautiful mornin'? It's turned a gray of the darkest degree, and Ah... (*Sees GIGGLES*) What is that thing doing like that out on this here street?

CLAIRE

My dear Mayor, Giggles the Clown has passed away. (*Bows her head*) Let us celebrate.

(MANDY steps over to examine GIGGLES.)

MANDY

This clown died of natural causes. (*Turns to face the others*) When shears are jammed directly into the brain, naturally it will cause death.

(JAKE enters from R, his right ear covered by a bloody bandage, carrying a bouquet of posies.)

JAKE

Got a singing floral delivery for Giggles the Clown...
"I heard you're feeling down,
I heard you're feeling blue,
But here's a dozen posies,
I hope they cheer up..."

(Sees the body of GIGGLES.)

...oh.

(LINDA enters from the drugstore with a crate of milk. She sees GIGGLES in the chair and promptly drops her crate, pointing and laughing hysterically.)

LINDA

Now that's funny! Oh my God, that's funny! *(Pointing at GIGGLES)* Oh, Giggles, stop it. Stop it, you're killing me!

JAKE

Linda...he's really dead.

LINDA

That's why it's so funny.

(KELLY pokes her head out of the restaurant.)

KELLY

What's going on?

(She leaves the restaurant, then runs over as she sees the horrible sight.)

No...no...NO!

CLAIRE

Yes...yes...yes.

LINDA

(Giggles again) It just got even funnier.

KELLY

Giggles! Oh, Giggles, no. What happened?

CLAIRE

Murder. *(Looks at Bernie)* Murder most foul.

BERNIE

Don't look at me! I don't know who did it, but it wasn't me!

CLAIRE

Then who did do it?

(After a small pause, everyone points to someone else. Slowly, they lower their hands.)

MANDY

A gruesome murder too, the best I figure it. No doubt a terribly painful end for Giggles the Clown. One shudders to think of it. The poor thing must have been pleading for his life. If only his horn were louder. Bernie, were you the one to find him?

BERNIE

Well, yes, but I didn't...

MANDY

That does it. I'm officially placing you on my official suspect list. *(Hastily scribbles on her notepad)* And Giggles the Clown receives an additional four demerits for destroying the picturesque beauty of Friendlyville's main thoroughfare with his unsightly murdered body. Now, who else can I put on my suspect list?

LINDA

(Raising her hand) Ooh, ooh!

MANDY

Very well. *(Writes on her notepad)* Linda Anderson.

LINDA

I didn't do it. I just like being on lists.

MANDY

As do I. But this is a serious list for serious suspects. Please limit your suggestions to those who you think may have murdered the clown.

LINDA

Well then how about Kelly? Everyone knows she and that clown have always hung around together. I bet there was something going on between them, something that we never knew about... *(Whispering)*...a private affair.

CLAIRE

Murdering the one you love. *(Sighs)* Truly romantic.

KELLY

WHAT? I didn't kill Giggles! How can you even think that?

DINKERSON

Oh, would you people please shut the hell up? Who cares who killed him? All I know is that his sorry excuse fer a clown's body is darkenin' up mah gorgeous sunny town. Let's get us a coffin and a couple shovels and get this carcass outta sight and outta mind. You... *(To CLAIRE)* ...death woman. How long would it take you to get a coffin from yer *(Pronouncing the word "fun-eral")* funeral parlor?

CLAIRE

Actually, I've been keeping one here under the bench for convenience's sake. It's actually for Old Man Ellison.

(ELLISON puts down his newspaper.)

ELLISON

What?

CLAIRE

But it will serve our current needs.

ELLISON

You've got a coffin waiting for me?

CLAIRE

Your time is coming, Old Man Ellison. It would be foolish to be caught...unprepared.

ELLISON

Well, I guess I can't argue... *(Knocks on the coffin below him)* ...hey, solid oak!

DINKERSON

Ah don't care who it's for. Just pull it on out and let's get this thing off the street. Jake, Bernie, pull out that there coffin.

(JAKE and BERNIE do so.)

Now open it up. Come on, ope' up.

(They open it. CLAIRE stands over it.)

CLAIRE

It looks so comfortable.

DINKERSON

Well, quit yer stallin'. Stuff 'im on in there. Ah don't got all dang day.

KELLY

Wait! You can't just toss him into his coffin and throw him into the grave without a word! This wasn't a mime, this was a clown! Giggles the Clown! And he deserves a fitting eulogy.

LINDA

OK, OK...keep your pants on.

(The lights go down, except for a spotlight on LINDA.)

We are gathered here to put to rest Giggles the Clown. He was a bad clown. We're glad he's dead.

(The lights restore.)

DINKERSON

Hear, hear. Awright, enough of that jibbity-gibberish. Close that clown up in his coffin and send him ta' his eternal rest.

CLAIRE

With pleasure. *(To JAKE and BERNIE)* Gentlemen, your assistance?

KELLY

No!

(Everyone looks at her.)

What kind of horrible eulogy is that?

MANDY

Quick and efficient.

BERNIE

(Looking down solemnly) It's what Giggles would have wanted.

KELLY

Giggles deserves more than that! Sure, maybe he wasn't the funniest clown around, but he's gone! Doesn't that mean anything to anyone? *(Looks around at the others accusingly.)* A noble clown, murdered...probably by somebody here...and we don't even have the decency to say more than a couple sentences before we throw him into the cold earth? I don't know about the rest of you, but there's no way I'm going to just stand by and let that happen. Giggles is getting his moving farewell.

MANDY

Very well— *(Checks her watch)* You're being timed.

KELLY

But I'm not a speaker! There's no way I could give Giggles the kind of speech he deserves. I want to...but I just can't. It's...it's too soon. Somebody else has to do it. Somebody with the ability to spin the very language of our hearts into the poetry we can all hear, and understand.

DINKERSON

Oh, all right. *(Clears his throat)* Giggles wuz not just a clown, dammit...well, no, he wuz just a clown, but not just a clown clown mind you, but a clown's clown, in a manner of speakin'.

KELLY

Um...I was thinking of somebody else, Mayor Dinkerson.

DINKERSON

But Ah'm the mayor. Ah'm a certified, bona fide, rarefied, stupified, poooblic speaker!

KELLY

I know you are, Mayor. It's just that you lack...you know...eloquence.

DINKERSON

Oh...well...awright. Guess I'm not much of a po'try spinner, but Ah'm willin' to try if y'all just gimme a little chance...

KELLY

I was hoping Jake might do it.

JAKE

Me?

DINKERSON

Him?

KELLY

I've always admired the little things Jake says to me when he delivers flowers from Jeff. Like that time Jeff sent me those wildflowers...Jake, you told me that I was wilder than any flower in the bunch. And every Valentine's Day for the past three years Jeff's had you bring me roses in a Cupid costume. Jake...when you sing to me as Cupid...something in me just lights up. When you're gone, I read Jeff's writing on the cards. Everything he writes is always terrible, full of misspellings and grammatical errors. He even writes "duh" when he's struggling to come up with a thought. I always imagine the words you would put on those cards. The things you say when you hand over the flowers from Jeff...they're so sweet. I know you could give a speech worthy of Giggles. You've got a golden tongue.

DINKERSON

Well mah tongue turns an awful variety of colors mahself, actually...

JAKE

Kelly, if it's what you really want...

DINKERSON

Green, black...not gold so much, but...

JAKE

Then I'll do it.

KELLY

Jake! Thank you!

DINKERSON

Oh. *(Slumping his head)* Well, OK. Ya' have the floor, florist.

(DINKERSON retreats sadly to the waiting arms of LINDA, who rocks him gently. JAKE stands the coffin on its end in front of the bench, then stands on the bench next to ELLISON using the coffin as a pulpit. The lights go down except for a lone light on JAKE.)

JAKE

Well...um...gee, I'm really not sure how to start. Giggles...well, Giggles...he was a clown. Giggles the Clown. But I guess we've kind of established that already. Anyway, what made Giggles a special clown...wasn't the way he giggled...or the way he was a clown. What made him special was...Giggles was a clown. *(Hangs his head)* I'm sorry. I can't do this.

(The lone light fades to black. The horrible clown music begins to play. GIGGLES SR.'s maniacal laughter is heard as well. A bicycle horn begins to honk; a whistle starts blowing, too. Suddenly, almost lost in the din of sound, a boy's voice speaks.)

BOY'S VOICE

Someday I'm going to go to the moon.

FATHER'S VOICE

But there aren't any flowers on the moon, silly.

BOY'S VOICE

I don't care about flowers. I want to be an astronaut.

FATHER'S VOICE

But in space there are no plants. And without plants we couldn't breathe. We take care of flowers, and they take care of us.

BOY'S VOICE

But I love stars.

FATHER'S VOICE

You love flowers.

BOY'S VOICE

I love stars.

FATHER'S VOICE

You love flowers.

(The BOY says "I love stars" over and over. The FATHER says "You love flowers" over and over, with the phrases matching each other. Gradually, the BOY'S VOICE turns questioning. Eventually, he starts to say "I love flowers." The FATHER'S VOICE gradually fades out. The lone light on JAKE comes up as the general din of sound fades away.)

JAKE

Stars.

(JAKE raises his head, and takes a deep, determined breath.)

I remember one time, Giggles Sr. came into my shop...well, it was my dad's shop at the time, but that's where I worked every day after school. Anyway, he had brought Giggles in to buy him his first water-squirting flower. My dad showed them our water-squirting flower selection, and Giggles Sr. selected the perfect flower for Giggles. It was a gorgeous purple violet, the kind of flower you just had to bend over and sniff, the kind of flower you never would expect shot out water. Well, he stuck that flower right in the buttonhole on Giggles' front pocket. And he said, "Hey, why don't you try out the flower on little Jake?" I was in the greenhouse working, and they thought I couldn't hear them, but I was listening the whole time. Next thing I know, Giggles was being shoved in the greenhouse by his father. Giggles Sr. left us alone, and Giggles...well, he said to me, "Hey Jake, my dad just bought me a flower. Why don't you smell it?" Of course I

JAKE, *Continued*

knew what was coming, but I bent over and smelled it anyway, because I know how much the success of that joke means to an aspiring clown. Well, I smelled that flower...and nothing happened. I looked up, and there was Giggles, smiling. It was one of the few times I ever saw him smile. I started laughing. So did he. His dad heard us laughing, and he came in laughing too, because he thought that Giggles had pulled the prank off, you know. Well, when Giggles Sr. saw that I wasn't wet, he stopped laughing right away. Giggles stopped too. Then Giggles Sr. pulled the violet out of Giggles's suit and threw it on the ground. He dragged Giggles out of the shop. Giggles was crying, and well...I guess I was crying too. My dad made me pull weeds the rest of the night for crying in the shop, because salt water's bad for plants you know, even a little. Well, you'd all better believe that after we put Giggles to rest, I'm going to go back to my shop, and I am going to cry. I'm going to cry for Giggles, because he's gone. And I'm going to cry for me, because I'm still in that damn flower shop. But most of all, I'm going to cry for us. Because we just lost the one person who dared to be something other than what he was supposed to be. Goodnight, sweet clown. Goodnight, and thank you.

(JAKE sets down the coffin. The lights come up full.)

KELLY

Jake...

DINKERSON

Well, florist, Ah don't know what ta' say.

LINDA

Well I do! That has got to be the single worst eulogy, no...worst speech, no...worst collection of SOUNDS I have ever heard coming out of the mouth of a human being!

DINKERSON

Ah think Linda speaks for all of us. Jake Robertson, Ah never thought Ah'd see the day. But I sar it, yep. Yep I did. I sar it good.

MANDY

Mayor Dinkerson, permission to keep my eye on Jake until further notice?

DINKERSON

Partition granted. Jake, Ah declare...man, I'm gettin' sick of makin' declarations...Ah declare, if you evah say anotheah unkind word about them flowahs of yours, yer gonna git yourself into a heap of trouble with the law.

JAKE

The lawn?

DINKERSON

No, not the lawn, the law, ya' one-eared freak! And that reminds me, it's me and mah wife's anniversary next week.

MANDY

Oh, Mayor Dinkerson, that reminds me to remind you that it's you and your wife's anniversary next week.

DINKERSON

Ah plan on sending mah Ellen a purty boo-quet of flowers, and I don't want her ta' git sick at the sight of a man who's missin' his ear. Ah don't care how ya' find one, and don't care how ya' git it...but you'd better have yourself an ear soon. Ah've got my eye on you.

MANDY

My eye is also on you Jake, thus making a total of two eyes focused squarely on you, the equivalent of one person's full attention.

DINKERSON

Mind you, florist, the last thing Ah want to see is mah wife unhappy. Come on Linda, let's go up ta' your apartment and get this unpleasantness outta our minds.

LINDA

You got it, Dinkie.

DINKERSON

Your um, your...Mr. Anderson won't be gettin' back anytime soon, will he?

LINDA

(Smiling) He's out of town...indefinitely.

(DINKERSON and LINDA start to exit into the drugstore. LINDA smirks at JAKE and KELLY as she goes by them. LINDA goes into the store first.)

DINKERSON

And for the love of garbonzo beans, git this clown outta here and buried.

(DINKERSON exits.)

MANDY

You heard the mayor. Get this mess cleaned up, all of you. Except for you, Kelly. You will accompany me into the restaurant, where I plan to order coffee and doughnuts. And while I hope it's not necessary, I do feel the need to stipulate that today is not a good day to make remarks about my stereotypical fondness for doughnuts.

KELLY

Yes, Officer.

(MANDY exits into the restaurant.)

(To JAKE) Thank you.

(KELLY exits into the restaurant.)

BERNIE

Well, I suppose I'd better get my shop cleaned up.

(BERNIE pulls the bloody shears out of GIGGLES's wig.)

Can't have things unsanitary, you know.

(He scratches himself with the shears, then turns to walk back to the barber shop. Before he exits, he turns back as though adding an afterthought.)

I didn't do it.

(BERNIE exits.)

CLAIRE

Do you believe him?

JAKE

Well, I'd like to...I mean, Bernie's about the nicest guy you're going to meet. But he's not the most stable individual. He might have even done it by accident. *(Reaching up to touch the bandage)* Why, just yesterday...

CLAIRE

Bernie is a rather fragile human being, isn't he? *(Laughs softly)* But then again... *(Takes GIGGLES'S free hand, putting her flowers down)* Who isn't? Jake, your assistance.

JAKE

What? Oh...oh, sure, of course.

(The two place the body of GIGGLES into the coffin. They both look into the coffin for a bit.)

Um, Claire, I feel kind of awkward asking this...

CLAIRE

Oh, don't feel awkward Jake, I do it all the time.

(She pulls the body of GIGGLES to her lips and gives it a passionate kiss.)

Your turn.

(She retrieves her flowers.)

JAKE

Actually, I was thinking of something else. What...um, what happens to the body now?

CLAIRE

It's buried. Seems something of a waste, doesn't it?

JAKE

Yeah...but I was wondering, well, what if a body had a certain...you know, a certain appendage that another person was lacking...

CLAIRE

Jake, are you...lacking?

JAKE

An ear! I need an ear! And I was thinking, well, since Giggles is dead...he wouldn't mind...

CLAIRE

Why, Jake! *(Flashing a seductive smile)* That would be dishonoring the dead.

JAKE

I know, I know.

CLAIRE

I simply can't hear such an idea.

JAKE

(Shaking his head) You're right. Forget I mentioned it.

CLAIRE

I can't allow such a thing to happen...but...once the body is buried, I would no longer have to know about such a thing. I might be able to...look the other way...if you do a favor for me.

JAKE

Name it.

CLAIRE

Allow me to come back into your shop.

JAKE

But Claire! You know what happens when you smell flowers! *(Points to her bouquet)*
Those flowers were red when I sold them to you.

CLAIRE

But Jake, if I can't come into your shop to...stop and smell the roses...I might get distracted. And when I get distracted, I start checking up on my old customers. It would be a shame if I checked up on Giggles, and found that he was missing something. I might have to let Officer Johnson know.

JAKE

OK, OK. You can come in once a week. Just be sure to cover your face with a handkerchief or something, OK?

CLAIRE

Of course, Jake.

(She closes the coffin and stands.)

Now would you be so kind as to accompany me to the cemetery for the digging? I understand you're quite the dirt-turner.

JAKE

Sure. I think it's going to be a slow day at the flower shop anyway.

(CLAIRE exits L. JAKE stares at the coffin.)

ELLISON

(Lowering the newspaper) Jake?

JAKE

(Turning to face him) Old Man Ellison?

ELLISON

You'll delivery my eulogy, won't you Jake?

JAKE

Of course I will, Old Man Ellison. I mean, if that's what you want.

ELLISON

Thank you, Jake.

(ELLISON puts up his newspaper. JAKE follows CLAIRE off L. After a small pause, KELLY pokes her head out of the restaurant. Seeing no one, she crosses over to the coffin, kneels by it and leans her head on it, crying. The lights begin to fade to black. Before they fade all the way, the faint sound of a bicycle horn is heard.)

ACT TWO

(AT RISE: Morning, two days later. ELLISON is sitting on the bench, behind his paper. A new newspaper drops out of the sky, and ELLISON repeats his routine of throwing the old paper away and looking at the new one. ELLISON flips through the paper.)

ELLISON

Obituaries, obituaries...why do they keep moving these? Well what the heck is this? The obituaries are missing! That Elmer.

(He snorts as he raises the paper. MAYOR QUINTON P. DINKERSON enters from L and takes a seat at one of the tables on the outdoor terrace of the restaurant.)

DINKERSON

Dammit all to the highest of heaven, is it too much to ask for the mayor of this here town to get some service? Ah'm starved to the bone, and if Ah don't get some victuals in me soon, I swear ah'm gonna be deader'n that clown!

(CLAIRE enters L.)

CLAIRE

Oh, that would a shame, Mayor Dinkerson.

(She walks over to the MAYOR's table and stands beside it.)

The severest of shames, undoubtedly.

DINKERSON

Claire Masterson. What the high hell are you doin' here?

CLAIRE

Personal business, my dear mayor. I'm meeting with one of my clients.

DINKERSON

I thought all your clients was supposed to be dead.

CLAIRE

Ideally.

(She begins to massage DINKERSON'S shoulders.)

But every once in a while, there's an individual or two who fancies something else I can provide them, something other than eternal peaceful internment.

DINKERSON

Well what the hell else ya' got?

CLAIRE

An undertaker has access to many things, Mayor. Many strange...and wondrous...things. You know, you don't even have to be dead to be peacefully, eternally interned. Other arrangements can be made, although most prefer to be dead at the time of burial. Unfortunately, that can take years...decades. *(Leans closer to him)* Fortunately, arrangements can be made to speed up the process.

(DINKERSON brushes her away from him.)

DINKERSON

Goodness gracious St. Aloysius, woman! Ya' give me the jeepers peepers creepers! Cain't ya' meet with this client of yers somewheres else?

CLAIRE

(Darkly, even for her) Arrangements have already been made.

(CLAIRE takes a seat at the other table.)

DINKERSON

Betsy to heavens, I tell ya', cain't get a bite to eat in this town without someone beggin' ya for scraps or givin' ya' the heebie-jeebies or somethin'. If I warn't already mayor here, well hell...I'd move right out, that's what I'd do.

CLAIRE

(Questioningly) If you weren't the mayor...

DINKERSON

Well, you know, that's a purely hy-po-thetical statement.

CLAIRE

My dear Mayor Dinkerson, you sound like Giggles, before he...passed away.

DINKERSON

Aw hell woman! Yer takin my words and twistin' 'em all up so they don't mean what I meant 'em to mean. It's that gosh-derned clown, that's what it is. He put crazy ideas inter ev'ryone's head. Ah tell you, he's pesterin' people from beyond the grave.

CLAIRE

Remarkable.

DINKERSON

(Whining) Aw, what the hell's goin' on here? I've been sittin' out here half the day yakkin' with the death woman, and I still ain't got no service. SERVICE! DAMMIT, AH DEMAND SERVICE OF THE UTMOST IMMEDIACY!

(KELLY enters from the restaurant, seeming oddly cheerful. She carries a handful of menus, each a different color.)

KELLY

Oh, I'm sorry Mayor Dinkerson, we didn't realize it was you.

DINKERSON

Didn't realize it was me? Well who the hell else it gonna be, little lady?

KELLY

Well Mayor, there's a variety of other people it might have been. Quite nearly anybody, actually.

DINKERSON

Anybody? Ain't no way just anybody's gonna be Quinton B. Dinkerson!

KELLY

I thought it was Quinton P. Dinkerson.

DINKERSON

NO, IT AIN'T QUIN...well, shoot. Ah' can't remember now. What the hell is it?

(OLD MAN ELLISON peers over his newspaper.)

ELLISON

She's right, Quinton P. Dinkerson. Says so right here.

DINKERSON

Dammit old man, what the hell did I tell you about correctin' me?

(ELLISON hides behind his newspaper.)

Aw, shoot, where'd he go? That derved Ellison sure gets my grits sometimes. Acts like he knows everything about everything.

KELLY

Are you ready to order, Mayor?

DINKERSON

Of course I'm ready ta' order! What kind of hog-washed question is that?

KELLY

And which menu will you be ordering from?

DINKERSON

Gimme the French one.

(KELLY shuffles through her menus until she finds a red one, then hands it to DINKERSON.)

KELLY

(Suddenly adopting a thick, stereotypical French accent) Oui, Monsieur. Would you like to see ze wine list? We have some very fine wine in ze cellar.

DINKERSON

Just give me whatever y'all got that's the cheapest.

KELLY

Oui, Monsieur, a spectacular choice.

DINKERSON

Yer' goshdamn right it's spectacular. Y'all got any specials?

KELLY

But of course, Monsieur...we have ze most wonderful specials today. Perhaps Monsieur would care for duck l'orange? I'm most certain Monsieur will not be disappointed. And also, we have chicken cordon bleu. *(Pronounces it "blech")* Always part of a fine dining experience, no?

DINKERSON

No.

KELLY

No?

DINKERSON

No!

KELLY

Oui, but of course. Monsieur Mayor is too sophisticated for chicken cordon bleu.

(Still "blech.")

DINKERSON

That's right. I'll have the duck-L-orange.

KELLY

Of course you will!

(KELLY strolls over to CLAIRE, losing the French accent and demeanor.)

Hi Claire! How are you doing?

CLAIRE

I'm quite adequate young Kelly, I assure you. And yourself?

KELLY

Oh, you know me! Can't complain!

CLAIRE

Of course you can't. You're so young...vibrant...full of life. You won't always be like that, you know.

KELLY

Well, no...I guess not always. But for now, you know...

(JAKE enters R and heads to the terrace. The right side of his head is still covered with a bandage. He also has a large bandage on his right hand.)

JAKE

(To CLAIRE) Sorry I'm late. I got my hand caught in the Venus flytrap again.

(He stops at DINKERSON'S table, attempting to make good with the mayor.)

Hi there, Mayor Dinkerson. So...how are things down at City Hall?

DINKERSON

Oh, just fine, Jake. How are things in the floral business? Like I give half a rat's ass.

JAKE

Oh, you know... *(Half-heartedly)*...wonderful. I love flowers.

DINKERSON

Dang straight ya' do. Florists love flowers. Nice and simple. Just the way we like it in Friendlyville.

CLAIRE

Please, be seated, Jake. You're just in time to order.

(JAKE sits at the table with CLAIRE.)

KELLY

(A little bit flirtatious) Hi Jake.

JAKE

Well hi there, Kelly. You're looking good...I mean, good to see you...you know, healthy and happy and all.

KELLY

Oh, well, you know...I'm happy now that you're here.

DINKERSON

Would you two shut up! Honest to hell, yer' carryin' on like a couple stray dogs in heat! Every second y'all yap is a second longer I gotta wait to eat! Cain't y'all see I'm starvin' here! Really, the nerve of some of the folk in this town.

KELLY

(To DINKERSON) OK, OK. *(To JAKE and CLAIRE)* What'll it be for you two?

CLAIRE

Something Italian sounds acceptable.

KELLY

(Becoming incredibly lively and adopting a stereotypical Italian accent) Ey, you want Italian? I got it, I got it right here.

(She tosses a green menu onto the table.)

KELLY, *Continued*

Come on, you go ahead and order! You getting way too skinny, you've gotta eat! I got anything you want-ah...fettuccini, rigatoni, ravioli, macaroni, pizza pie-ah...whatsamatta you, don't you want to eat? You can tell me, eh, I'm like a sister! And we got all the breadsticks you want, eh?

CLAIRE

The fettuccini alfredo will be fine, thank you.

KELLY

Fettuccini! And I get you some red wine, eh? Something to go good with that.

CLAIRE

Please.

(KELLY grabs the green menu and looks expectantly at JAKE.)

KELLY

And how about you, Jake?

JAKE

You know, I'm really in the mood for some Thai food right now.

KELLY

Oh, I'm sorry Jake... *(Takes a few poor stabs at a Thai accent)* We've got spicy food and spicy girls...welcome to Thailand, where we... *(Normal voice)* Nope, I'm afraid I can't do that one yet. I tried.

CLAIRE

Rather pitiful attempt.

KELLY

But I'm still new here! And not too many people order from the Thai menu, and I still haven't learned...

JAKE

Hey, hey, calm down...it's OK. I'll just have some clam chowder and a beer.

KELLY

(In a New England accent) Wicked pisser choice, Jake.

(KELLY exits into the restaurant. During the following exchange, DINKERSON makes it rather obvious he is eavesdropping on CLAIRE and JAKE, leaning way, way over in his chair.)

CLAIRE

(Adopting a hushed tone) Everything worked out, I presume?

JAKE

(Points to his bandaged ear) Obviously not!

CLAIRE

Hmm. I see.

JAKE

Claire...something's wrong. Horribly, horribly wrong!

CLAIRE

(Raising an eyebrow) Horribly?

JAKE

Horribly!

(CLAIRE leans forward and grabs JAKE'S hands.)

CLAIRE

Jake, I'm intrigued...go on.

JAKE

Well, I went to the cemetery last night, just like you said. I went over to Giggles' grave...oh, and listen to this: Yesterday, Jeff Bradson picked up some flowers from me. He said they were for Kelly, but last night I found the very same flowers he picked up leaning against Giggles' tombstone!

CLAIRE

Extraordinary.

JAKE

At first I thought that maybe I was mistaken, but it was the same bouquet of roses, violets, and lilacs that I gave to Jeff...and baby's breath, of course, to fill everything in. They weren't just red roses, mind you. See, I told Jeff that if you really want to wow a girl...

CLAIRE

(Cutting him off) And the flowers were there at the grave. *(Letting go of his hands)* Yes, Jake, that certainly is interesting. Horrible, however, is hardly a word I find merited by the situation.

JAKE

But that wasn't the horrible thing.

CLAIRE

Really? *(Grabbing his hands again)* Go on.

JAKE

Well, I dug up the coffin...I tried to use my hand trowel, mind you, I really did, for a more accurate job. I figured if I was going to do Giggles the dishonor of digging him up, I could at least ensure that his topsoil was sufficiently fertile.

CLAIRE

Jake, please. The point?

JAKE

I'm sorry. Well, I got the coffin out, opened it up, and...get this...

(KELLY emerges from the restaurant holding a tray containing two wine glasses and a glass of beer. She heads over to JAKE and CLAIRE first, setting down the beer and one of the glasses of wine.)

KELLY

(In the New England accent) Here's yah beer, Jakie. I'll pahk it right here. *(In the Italian accent)* Hey, and I get the wine-ah!

JAKE

Thanks, Kelly.

KELLY

(In her own voice) No need to thank me. It's my job.

DINKERSON

Oh, for the love of all that's good and unholy, bring me mah wine, missy! Ah declare, all this sober-iety is killin' me!

(KELLY gives JAKE a sweet smile, then gracefully moves over to DINKERSON'S table.)

KELLY

(In her French persona) And here is your fine wine, Monsieur.

DINKERSON

FINE? I asked fer the cheapest y'all got!

KELLY

But Monsieur, all of our wine is of ze finest caliber. Even ze cheapest!

DINKERSON

Well, all right. But you better have one of those placemats for me!

KELLY

But of course.

(She reaches into her apron pocket and pulls out a colorful children's placemat.)

Here you go.

DINKERSON

(Studying the placemat) Well what the high hell kinda foreign language is this thing written in, Sanskrit?

KELLY

(Looking at the placemat) Those are ze scrambled words, Monsieur Mayor.

DINKERSON

SCRAMBLED? What good they gonna do me all scrambled? I want mah eggs scrambled. I want mah football scrambled. I don't want mah words scrambled!

KELLY

Ze point is to unscramble zem into normal words.

DINKERSON

Why didn't they just put normal words in the first place?

KELLY

Because it is supposed to be fun!

DINKERSON

Well it ain't! It's gotta be about the damn well stupidest idea Ah've heard about since sliced bread!

KELLY

Perhaps ze gentleman would prefer to just connect ze dots?

DINKERSON

How am Ah supposed to connect dots when I ain't got no writin' utensil. Ah don't got no utensils yet period, much less one of the writin' variety!

(KELLY reaches in her apron pocket and pulls out a pencil.)

A pencil! Ah can't use no danged pencil! Where's mah crayon?

(KELLY puts the pencil back in her pocket and pulls out a pink crayon.)

Pink! What kinda self-respectin' man colors with a pink crayon?

(KELLY puts the pink crayon back and pulls out a brown one. With a very sarcastic smile she hands it to the mayor. She then quickly wheels around and heads back into the restaurant.)

Well, that's more like it.

(DINKERSON half works on connecting the dots on his placemat while still obviously eavesdropping on the conversation.)

CLAIRE

Now Jake, you were saying?

JAKE

Ah, yes. Now where was I? Oh, right. Well, I shoveled the dirt back onto the coffin. I was still a little shaken up, but I went home and still managed to get a few hours of sleep in before I had to go to reopen the flower shop the next day.

CLAIRE

(After an awkward pause) I think you skipped part of your story.

JAKE

I did? Was it the part about how I put in baby's breath to fill in the bouquet nicely?

DINKERSON

(Looking at his placemat) What the hell is this supposed to be? A tree, or a damn lollipop?

CLAIRE

No, it wasn't that. Jake...what did you find in the coffin?

(DINKERSON starts to sip from his wine.)

JAKE

Oh, right, that. Claire...I didn't find anything! Giggles was gone!

(DINKERSON spits his wine all over the table. He then takes another sip, then spits it all over the table again.)

CLAIRE

You're absolutely positive that Giggles wasn't in the casket?

JAKE

Come on, Claire! It's not the kind of thing a person's going to miss! The coffin was empty!

DINKERSON

Outrageous! Outlandish!

(He gets up from his table and faces JAKE and CLAIRE.)

Preposterous. Absolute hogwash, that's what it is!

JAKE

Excuse me, Mayor?

DINKERSON

Ah declare, Jake Robertson, them statements you's makin' is dangerously unfounded.

JAKE

What statements?

DINKERSON

Don't play dumb with me! Y'all know I heard y'all talkin'. Ain't no clown missin' his body round here.

JAKE

(Standing) But it's true, Mayor!

DINKERSON

Now robbin' graves, that's one thing. But to lie to the mayor of Friendlyville to his face, well that's just downright uncivilized.

CLAIRE

(Standing) In Jake's defense, Mayor, I find his story captivating.

DINKERSON

Well what the hell does that gotta do with anything?

CLAIRE

I tend to believe what I find captivating, as I find it makes life far more bearable than constantly subjecting myself to mundane interpretations of existence. I find Jake's story incredibly captivating, and thus all too believable.

DINKERSON

Hmm. Well, Ah do see yer point. But Ah refuse to accept this story without some kind of evidence.

JAKE

Just go out to the cemetery yourself and have a look!

DINKERSON

And dig through all that dirt? Jake Robertson, does that sound like the job of a mayor tah you?

JAKE

No sir.

DINKERSON

Then whose job does it sound like?

JAKE

Well, mine, I guess.

DINKERSON

Yeah...Ah guess it does kind of sound like that. But Ah was thinkin' more of the death woman. Death Woman, I want you and Officer Mandy both to go out to that cemetery and come back with that clown's coffin. Heaven help me, there had better be a body in there, too!

JAKE

But there is no body!

DINKERSON

(Darkly angry) Ah told you, Jake, that clown had better be in there, or Officer Mandy's gonna be takin' you in for a long stay. Ah reckon it might even be the end of the rope for you.

CLAIRE

Really?

JAKE

But Mayor Dinkerson! I can't...I mean, who's going to sell the flowers?

DINKERSON

Ain't no use makin' excuses now. *(Shouts toward L)* MANDY! GET YER LAW-ENFORCIN' HIDE OVER HERE!

(OFFICER MANDY strides on purposefully from L.)

MANDY

Reporting as requested, sir. Is there some sort of trouble in the vicinity?

DINKERSON

Oh, we got us a whole heap of trouble, Mandy. Looks like our local florist has takin' a likin' to body snatchin'.

MANDY

Body snatching? In the grave-robbing sense, or in the alien invaders taking over people's minds sense?

DINKERSON

The first one, Ah think.

MANDY

The point is moot, really. It's a crime of heinous proportions either way.

DINKERSON

You go off with Death Woman and y'all bring me the clown's coffin. I want you to do a proper eggs and hamination, ta' see whether it's gotta body in it or not.

MANDY

That will be difficult to determine, Mayor. The cemetery is perpetually dark and gloomy without exception, and a proper...um...examination will take some time there.

DINKERSON

Hell in a hoagie, woman, ya' got yer ears plugged up? Ah told you to bring the coffin here, where we can all see it.

MANDY

Bring it all the way over here to open it? A rather unorthodox way of doing things.

DINKERSON

That's why Ah'm the mayor, Ah got the smarts for it. Go on, get to it.

MANDY

Claire! *(Blowing her whistle)* You're with me.

(MANDY hurries off L, with CLAIRE following slowly behind.)

JAKE

Mayor, I'm telling you, I'm totally innocent. All I wanted was the ear, not the whole thing. Just a little ear, Mayor.

DINKERSON

Just a little ear. It always starts there, doesn't it? *(Shouting up to the window above the drugstore)* Linda! Get down here!

(The sound of quick running down the stairs is heard from the drugstore, then LINDA emerges.)

LINDA

What do you want, Quinton?

(DINKERSON fumes, sputtering angry gibberish and pointing at JAKE.)

I mean Mayor Dinkerson.

DINKERSON

Jake here's gonna be held prisoner on suspicion of body snatchin'. You take him up there in that apartment of yours fer the time bein'. Ah know you got the... *(Clears throat)*...chains and handcuffs, and other necessary items to hold 'im.

LINDA

(Absolutely delighted) A prisoner!

DINKERSON

That's right. Get 'im on up there.

LINDA

Let's go, Jake.

(She grabs his hands and holds them behind his back.)

JAKE

No! This is ridiculous. I'm not going anywhere. I refuse to be held against my will.

(DINKERSON removes a tiny gun from under his hat and points it at JAKE.)

DINKERSON

One more word florist, and the only flowers you'll be pushin' is daisies...you know, from the bottom.

LINDA

I think I can hear him muttering under his breath, Dinkie. Shoot him!

JAKE

WHAT? I'm not saying anything!

(DINKERSON cocks his gun. Silence follows. DINKERSON nods, then places the gun back under his hat. A loud shot is heard. DINKERSON sputters incoherently, feeling his head to make sure everything is still intact. He then again retrieves the gun.)

DINKERSON

(Clearing his throat) Forgot to put the safety back on.

(He does so, then puts the gun back under his hat.)

Get 'im outta here.

LINDA

With pleasure.

(She gives JAKE an evil grin, then starts to pull him into the drugstore. Just as he is being pulled in, GIGGLES THE CLOWN enters from R, wearing coveralls and no clown makeup, sweeping the street with a broom. He pauses from his sweeping to watch LINDA pull JAKE into the store.)

GIGGLES

Now isn't that a shame?

DINKERSON

Isn't what a shame?

GIGGLES

An innocent man, being threatened with death. Boy, that seems to happen a lot here, doesn't it?

DINKERSON

Maybe it does. What the hell's yer point?

GIGGLES

Just seems a little sad to me, that's all.

DINKERSON

I ain't seen you 'round these parts before. Ah'm Mayor Quinton P. Dinkerson, the mayor of Friendlyville. The mayor, mind you. And we don't look kindly toward strangers in this here town.

GIGGLES

Have you ever thought that maybe strangers wouldn't look kindly toward you?

DINKERSON

Not for a second. What's yer name, stranger?

GIGGLES

Collin Giggleson. (*Holds up his broom*) I'm a street-sweeper.

DINKERSON

Street-sweeper? We already got us a street-sweeper. Goober Hanson, best street-sweeper in the state. 'Cept for those automated street sweepers, 'course, but I'd rather have Goober than some confounded contraption sweepin' mah streets anyday.

GIGGLES

But I'm pretty handy with a broom. (*Shows off his fancy broom-work*) Don't you think I'd make a fine addition to your town's work force?

DINKERSON

Do you got holes in yer ears? Besides the, uh, the usual ones, Ah mean. We don't need another street-sweeper. (*Getting an idea*) But say, we do have one opening...have you ever done any clownin'?

GIGGLES

No. Definitely not. Definitely, definitely...not.

DINKERSON

Aw, it ain't that hard. Ya' just drive around in a little car, sprayin' people, throwin' pastries at 'em, stuffin' critters down their shirts...some light computer work...You'd have ta' be better than the last one we had.

GIGGLES

I appreciate the offer, but no. I'm no clown.

DINKERSON

Well, then you'd best keep on sweepin' yer way right outta Friendlyville...unless...say, you know anything about flowers? (*Scoots closer to GIGGLES*) 'Cuz, well, don't go tellin' ev'rybody, but Ah think we're gonna be needin' us a new town florist real soon.

(CLAIRE and MANDY return from L, carrying the coffin GIGGLES was buried in.)

MANDY

Mayor Dinkerson! Is everything all right over here? We heard a gunshot.

DINKERSON

Ah'm fine. Just blew another hole in mah hat again.

MANDY

There don't seem to be any holes in your hat, Mayor.

DINKERSON

Hmm.

(He retrieves the gun and peers into the barrel. LINDA leans out the apartment window.)

Must be shootin' blanks.

LINDA

Trust me, you are.

(DINKERSON places the gun back under his hat as LINDA disappears from the window.)

DINKERSON

Gotta git me a new one a' those, Ah guess. Well, let's have a look at that coffin.

MANDY

I'd say it looks like a fairly standard coffin.

ELLISON

(Lowering his newspaper) Solid oak.

GIGGLES

It's rather uncomfortable. At least, that would be my guess.

MANDY

A stranger! (*Eyeing him suspiciously*) I don't recall being informed that I would be meeting a stranger today.

GIGGLES

I'm Collin Giggleson.

(He extends his hand.)

MANDY

(Writing in her notebook) At the time of meeting, the stranger extended his hand in a threatening manner. *(To GIGGLES)* Normally this would be a cause for ten demerits, but seeing as it's a first offense... TWENTY DEMERITS!

DINKERSON

Ah thought I told you to get the high hell outta mah town!

GIGGLES

I'll be on my way in just a little bit, Mayor Stinkerson.

(DINKERSON is just short of exploding. It Takes him over five full seconds to regain his composure.)

DINKERSON

Mandy! You let this superfluous street-sweeper know that makin' fun of the name of Mayor Quinton P. Dinkerson is against the law.

MANDY

Actually, Mayor, not laughing when the name of Mayor Quinton P. Dinkerson is made fun of is against the law. I'm afraid I'll have to assign everyone present five demerits.

(She writes in her book.)

Stinkerson. Heh heh. *(Looking up)* Ooh. *(Smiles)* Except for me.

DINKERSON

Aw, enough of this nonsensical...um...nonsense. Open up the coffin and let's see if we got us a body snatcher!

(CLAIRE removes the lid of the coffin. Everyone except ELLISON crowds around it and looks in, with GIGGLES coming up last and looking in as well. A collective gasp from all but GIGGLES.)

CLAIRE

It's true. My, Jake is greedy, isn't he?

ELLISON

What do you suppose he did with the body?

GIGGLES

(Sweeping inside the coffin) Good question.

DINKERSON

The florist is guilty! Bring forth the noose!

MANDY

The noose!

BERNIE

(Sticking his head out of his shop and snipping his shears) The noose!

ELLISON

(Coughing) The noose!

CLAIRE

(Clapping her hands with delight) The noose!

GIGGLES

Wait! This is completely unfair! Jake deserves...I mean, this Jake person deserves a fair trial.

(The others clearly do not think this is a good idea, but DINKERSON calms them.)

DINKERSON

Now, now, calm down. The stranger's right. Jake deserves a trial, and he's gonna git himself one right now. Mandy, the envelope please.

(MANDY retrieves an envelope from a pocket and hands it to DINKERSON, who opens it and begins reading.)

DINKERSON, *Continued*

We, the good citizens of Friendlyville, find the defendant...innocent. Innocent? Aw, dang it all, this ain't the right one!

MANDY

I'm sorry, Mayor. Wrong pocket.

(She retrieves another envelope from a different pocket and again hands it to DINKERSON. He opens it and reads.)

DINKERSON

We, the good citizens of Friendlyville, find the defendant...GUILTY! Bring forth the noose!

EVERYONE BUT GIGGLES

The noose! The noose!

(JAKE appears at the upstairs apartment window.)

JAKE

(His words dripping with corniness) The goose? Did Farmer Donaldson leave that front gate open again?

(LINDA appears next to JAKE, holding a noose, which she shows him with a slow smile.)

Oh.

LINDA

Nothing like a little afternoon execution, is there Jake? Just the kind of spectacle to keep people entertained when we're short a clown. Well, let's give this thing a little test flight here.

(She tosses the noose out of the window. It's far too long, landing directly on the ground.)

Ugh! I made it too long. Compensation for last night, I guess.

DINKERSON

Mandy, Ah'd like that last remark stricken from the record.

MANDY

Noted.

LINDA

It'll be a little bit while I try to fix this thing to the right length. Hold tight, everybody. (*Seeing GIGGLES*) Oooh, a mysterious stranger! We'll need two nooses!

(LINDA disappears away from the window, pulling JAKE away with her.)

CLAIRE

Well, that was a disappointment. But it will give me time to run over to the cemetery and select a grave site for Jake. And the beautiful part is that we can just use the coffin we have here. Well, no...the beautiful part is that Jake will be dead.

(She exits L. KELLY enters carrying a tray with two candles and an uncooked duck.)

KELLY

(In her French persona) Monsieur Mayor! Your duck is ready!

DINKERSON

Well, Ah'm afraid all this excitementation has led me ta' lose mah appetite. Just leave that duck on that there table. I'll give a proper consummation later.

(KELLY sets the tray down on the table. She then sees GIGGLES.)

KELLY

Giggles!

(GIGGLES makes a "they don't know" gesture.)

...is gone! Oh no! What happened to his body?

MANDY

Body-snatchery, little Miss Neilson. But don't you worry. The culprit, Jake Robertson, stands to be executed shortly.

KELLY

Jake? No!

MANDY

Jake was under the watchful eye of the law, Kelly. He was informed that one more slip-up would yield certain death, so I'm afraid that since he committed a certain slip-up, certainly certain death is the certain course we must certainly take.

DINKERSON

Come on, Mandy. Let's pick Jake out a tombstone.

MANDY

Agreed.

(She starts to head R.)

DINKERSON

Where you goin'?

MANDY

(Stopping) The monument shop. Roger Goodson engraves all the tombstones there.

DINKERSON

Naw, naw. We ain't spendin' that kind of money on a florist. Let's get one of them generic tombstones from the drugstore.

(DINKERSON and MANDY exit into the drugstore.)

ELLISON

(Shaking his head) Sure hope they spring for one of Goodson's monuments when I go. One of the ones with an angel on top. Like being buried underneath a Christmas tree. Yep. That's all anyone can hope for, I think. To be buried with an angel sitting above you.

(ELLISON raises his paper. KELLY pulls GIGGLES DR.)

KELLY

I thought we agreed you were going to leave town!

GIGGLES

I was going to...but I couldn't bring myself to do it.

KELLY

But you hate it here! That's what you told me. You were trapped in the life of a clown, and you got out! So go! If they find out who you are, they're going to shove you right back in that coffin. But before they even do that, they're going to shove you right back in your clown costume. You're not a clown!

GIGGLES

I'm not going to go.

KELLY

Are you crazy?

GIGGLES

This town needs me. And in a weird sort of way, I need it. I realized that when I heard Jake's eulogy. There's a lot of good I can do in Friendlyville.

KELLY

What good can you do if you're killed?

GIGGLES

Nobody's going to figure out who I am.

KELLY

But everyone in this town is going to be looking for the body of Giggles the Clown! And sooner or later, somebody's going to realize there's something awfully familiar about the stranger with the broom.

GIGGLES

There has to be a way I can stay. I know I can help Friendlyville. When I was a clown, well...for some reason nobody ever took me seriously. But now that I'm free of that makeup, and wig, and nose...and that bicycle horn...now that I have a voice, I know I can make a difference. There must be something I can do here besides be a clown or a florist.

KELLY

Jake! Oh, Jake...Giggles, if you're going to stay, then you have to help Jake.

GIGGLES

How? I don't know what to do.

KELLY

We can't let him die! I...I think I love him.

GIGGLES

You think you love Jake? But I thought...you and I...

KELLY

Giggles, you knew I had a boyfriend.

GIGGLES

But it isn't Jake, it's Jeff Bradson!

KELLY

Well, regardless of that fact you should have known I was taken. When I was a little girl I promised myself I would never fall in love with a sad clown. All they do is break your heart.

GIGGLES

But I'm not a clown anymore!

KELLY

Maybe not. But you're still sad. You'll always be sad, Giggles. Too sad for me.

GIGGLES

You know, if you really think I'm too sad, this isn't doing much to brighten my disposition.

KELLY

I know. I'm sorry.

GIGGLES

I was going to stay in this town because I couldn't bear to leave you behind.

KELLY

Oh. Well. *(Sadly)* I guess you're going to be going then.

GIGGLES

I guess so.

KELLY

Goodbye, Giggles.

GIGGLES

Goodbye.

(KELLY starts to head back to the restaurant. She turns back to Giggles before she leaves.)

KELLY

I always loved you, you know. Just not like that.

(KELLY exits into the restaurant.)

GIGGLES

(To himself) Not like that.

(ELLISON lowers his paper and watches GIGGLES.)

I never get that. I've spent my whole life wanting that, but I always get this. I'm tired of this. Why are there so many "thisses" and no "thats"? Well, you know what? Screw this.

ELLISON

You know what the nice thing about this and that is? All you have to do to turn a that into a this is step up to it. When you're far away from something, it's a that. Get up close, it's a this.

GIGGLES

Yeah, thanks for the advice. I have to get going, though.

ELLISON

Stick around a bit. Keep an old man company, won't you?

(GIGGLES looks reluctant, but he sits next to ELLISON on the bench.)

Why don't you do me a favor and help me out with this crossword puzzle? They've got a real doozie today. Ten down: "Friendlyville's former clown; also, street-sweeping stranger." Seems like it should be Giggles the Clown, right? Fifteen letters. It fits. But you're the street sweeping stranger, aren't you? Collin Giggleson. How do you spell your first name? One L or two?

GIGGLES

Two.

ELLISON

Collin Giggleson. Fifteen letters. That fits too, see? But how can it be both of them? That doesn't make sense.

GIGGLES

Actually, it kind of does.

ELLISON

(After studying GIGGLES) Well, I'll be. Giggles! I thought you had left us.

GIGGLES

Nope. I'm still here. But not for long.

ELLISON

All that trouble you went through dying, and now you're just going to take off and leave?

GIGGLES

Old Man Ellison, have you ever been in love?

(ELLISON lets out a long sigh, then, for the first time, sets the newspaper down.)

ELLISON

Oh, sure. I've been in love.

GIGGLES

How'd it work out?

ELLISON

I'm an old man alone on a bench. That's how it worked out.

GIGGLES

Love is pretty stupid, isn't it?

ELLISON

No, Giggles. Love isn't stupid. People are.

GIGGLES

What do you mean?

ELLISON

When someone loves someone else, they always ask something in return. They want to be loved back.

GIGGLES

I think that's natural.

ELLISON

I think it's asking too much.

GIGGLES

No offense, Old Man Ellison, but I think that's pretty crazy.

ELLISON

No offense taken. I think we might be talking about different things. I'm talking about love.

GIGGLES

I'm talking about love.

ELLISON

Are you? See, I'm talking about real love. Real love is unconditional. It asks for nothing. Not even for love itself. It's not for everyone, though, real love. Nope. In fact, I'd venture to say only a handful of people in history have ever really been in love. No one in Friendlyville, that's for sure.

GIGGLES

Not even you?

ELLISON

Me? Hell no, son. I expect to be loved back. I do regret that, though. I wish I could have loved those who didn't love me. There were so many. I could have done a lot for them, changed their world. But...I just didn't have it in me. Yes sir, if I could only do it all over again, that's the one thing I would change. I would love.

GIGGLES

Pardon me for saying it, but the kind of love you're talking about...I don't think a human being is really capable of that.

ELLISON

You may be right. Real love may not be a human quality. I guess...I guess it would probably take an angel.

GIGGLES

Well, I'm no angel.

ELLISON

Aren't you?

(ELLISON stands up and looks into the coffin.)

Funny. I thought the last place I saw you was in here.

(ELLISON sits back down and picks up the paper.)

Shame you have to leave, Giggles. We could use a young man like you.

GIGGLES

I can't stay here. I'm no clown.

ELLISON

We don't need one. In my opinion, everyone's a clown. Well. Goodbye.

(ELLISON hides behind the newspaper. GIGGLES stands, picking up the broom. He takes a long look at the town, then exits R. After he leaves, MANDY and DINKERSON enter from the drugstore. DINKERSON holds a plain-looking tombstone.)

DINKERSON

(Reading the tombstone) “Here lies...a body.” Perfect.

(DINKERSON leans the tombstone against the fence.)

MANDY

Looks like that stranger finally left. He was an odd one, wasn't he?

DINKERSON

He was somethin' of an oddity, mind you. That's why Ah never trust strangers. Ya' always run the risk of them bein' odd.

MANDY

Speaking of odd... *(Produces a piece of paper from an inside pocket)* ...I was doing a little looking into Giggles the Clown's case, and I thought to retrieve his academic records from Hardy-Har-Harvard Clown College. *(Showing DINKERSON the paper)* It seems Giggles flunked every single class with the exception of one. He earned an A in “Death-faking.”

DINKERSON

What's yer dang point?

MANDY

My point, Mayor Dinkerson...is that Giggles the Clown had a very poor grade point average. No wonder he dropped out.

DINKERSON

Good bit a' sleuthin', Mandy. *(Checks his watch)* Great Scotch! Is that woman ever gonna git that noose ready? Ah'm gittin' mighty overanxious.

(KELLY pokes her head out of the restaurant, holding out a telephone receiver.)

KELLY

Mayor Dinkerson? You have a telephone call.

DINKERSON

A phone call? It ain't mah wife, is it?

KELLY

I don't think so.

DINKERSON

Well, aw-right. Bring it over here.

(KELLY brings the receiver over to DINKERSON, stretching the cord to a ridiculous length. DINKERSON takes the phone and speaks into it.)

This is Mayor Quinton P. Dinkerson. *(Beat)* What? Mah refrigerator? Well Ah don't rightly know, Ah can't see it at the moment. But Ah assume it's runnin'. *(Beat)* WHAT? Aw, gosh dammit!

(DINKERSON hands the phone back to KELLY, sputtering angrily.)

You'll have to excuse me, but there's a very imp-o-tent mattah Ah must attend to presently. It seems my refrigerator's run off on me, and Ah must go catch it. Mandy, you keep an eye open and make sure that Jake don't go runnin' off himself. Ah'll be back as quick as Ah can. *(Muttering as he goes off)* Ev'ry damn week.

(DINKERSON exits L. KELLY returns to the restaurant. After a moment, the gate on the picket fence swings open. For the first time, we see the full phone booth that is behind the fence. GIGGLES is casually leaning against it, holding the phone's receiver. He hangs it up, grabs his broom, then steps through the gate. MANDY does not look pleased to see him.)

MANDY

You again. I thought you had left.

GIGGLES

Oh, no. I'm not going anywhere. Just went around back to make a call.

MANDY

(Suspiciously) A call?

GIGGLES

(Approaching MANDY) Um, Officer...I've been doing some thinking.

MANDY

Strangers aren't allowed to think.

GIGGLES

Well, it just sort of happened. Anyway, I was wondering what this Jake fellow would want with a whole body.

MANDY

He owns a flower shop. *(As though it's obvious)* Fertilizer.

GIGGLES

But it was a clown's body, and any florist would know that a clown's body is just going to stunt the growth of any plant.

MANDY

Hmm. Your point is well-taken, but regardless of its validity Jake has been found guilty by our legal system, and nothing can overturn his sentence.

GIGGLES

It's not Jake I'm worried about. It's everyone else.

MANDY

What are you babbling about?

GIGGLES

Let's say Jake didn't take the body. You realize, of course, what the other possibility would be...don't you?

MANDY

Spontaneous teleportation? Unlikely.

GIGGLES

Don't you know what happens to bad clowns when they die?

MANDY

It's something I've spent the greater part of my life contemplating, but no, I'm afraid I don't know.

GIGGLES

They become killer zombie clowns!

MANDY

(Gasping) From outer space?

GIGGLES

Not in this case. But even a regular killer zombie clown can wreak a great deal of havoc upon an unsuspecting small town such as Friendlyville. Zombies in themselves are bad enough, killer zombies are even worse. But when you have a killer zombie clown on your hands, the mass murder takes on a whole new level. It isn't just horrible. It's...profound.

MANDY

(Horried) A killer zombie clown. If what you're suggesting is really true, I have to seek it out and kill it immediately!

GIGGLES

But you can't just kill a killer zombie clown. It's already dead. What you have to do, see, is spray it in the eyes with seltzer water. Then you throw the biggest pie you can find in its face, and stuff it into the tiniest car. Then, and only then, can you drive that clown out of town.

MANDY

I have to get to the bakery! But...I can't leave my post unguarded.

GIGGLES

But think of all the awards you would get...the promotions...

MANDY

I might even receive...a merit!

GIGGLES

Quick, hurry, before it's too late! I'll stand guard for you.

MANDY

Agreed! But if the prisoner escapes....I shudder to think of the number of demerits you will receive.

(MANDY hurriedly exits R. ELLISON lowers his paper.)

ELLISON

You certainly weren't gone very long.

GIGGLES

I'm not going anywhere until I get Jake out of all this. He's a good guy.

ELLISON

You're darn right he is. You should have heard what he said when he gave your eulogy. Too bad you couldn't, on account of you being dead and all.

GIGGLES

I wasn't dead.

(LINDA appears at the window above the drugstore. She tosses the noose over the side of the window, letting it dangle below.)

LINDA

Perfect! *(Looking around)* Hey, where is everybody? They'd better get back here if they want to see this. Guess I should turn on the signal.

(LINDA disappears from the window. After a short pause, the stage is bathed in an ominous, slowly flashing red light. A siren like a tornado siren, only slightly lower in pitch, blares in the distance.)

ELLISON

Uh-oh. The execution siren. Haven't heard that go off since I was a little wippen-snapper. You'd better get up there.

GIGGLES

But what about Linda?

(ELLISON suddenly looks different, as though he is in pain.)

ELLISON

I...I'm sorry...I can't help you anymore...

(ELLISON slowly lifts up his newspaper and hides behind it.)

GIGGLES

Old Man Ellison, wait! Old Man Ellison!

(ELLISON does not move. The execution siren continues to flash and wail. GIGGLES takes a deep breath, then holds up his broom as though it were a weapon.)

OK. This is for everyone out there who doesn't always want to be a clown. Or florist. Or waitress. Or...town drunk, or village idiot, or whatever. *(Gathering his courage)* Here we go.

(GIGGLES heads toward the drugstore. Just as he reaches the entrance, BERNIE enters from the barber shop.)

BERNIE

(Holding up his shears) Hold it right there, stranger.

(GIGGLES stops and turns back to look at BERNIE, who looks scarier than usual-almost zombie-like.)

I'm afraid I can't let you go up there.

GIGGLES

Bernie...

BERNIE

Some of us like who we are. If I wasn't a barber, I wouldn't be anything.

GIGGLES

Nobody said you can't be a barber.

BERNIE

(Advancing slowly on GIGGLES as he snips his shears) A barber maintains order. When things start to get too long and unruly...when something grows past the point where it should...the barber cuts it right back down to where it should be. That's the job of a barber, wouldn't you say? To keep things from advancing too far. The barber stands as a hedge against time. He upholds tradition. Keeps everything the same. Same ol', same ol'.

(GIGGLES holds up the broom to fend off BERNIE, who suddenly stops, as though coming out of a trance.)

Hey! That's my broom!

GIGGLES

(Backing away from BERNIE) But it's in my hand.

BERNIE

But it's mine!

GIGGLES

But when we're talking about something like the ownership of a broom, we normally talk in the present tense, right?

BERNIE

Well I suppose so, but...

GIGGLES

And since a broom has no title or deed, the only way to define its ownership is through possession, correct?

BERNIE

Um...in a manner of speaking.

GIGGLES

Now, since I POSSESS the broom in the PRESENT time, obviously this broom, which you claim to be yours, is mine. Isn't that true?

BERNIE

Yes, but...

GIGGLES

What kind of barber wouldn't have a broom? Why, I wouldn't call that person a barber at all. The hair would just pile up on the floor, meaning nothing could ever be cleared away. And I would hardly call that protecting order.

BERNIE

I...please...I need that broom.

GIGGLES

If you hurry, you might be able to get to the broom shop before it closes.

(BERNIE stands, nervously snipping his shears, looking back and forth between GIGGLES and offstage. Finally, he makes a decision. He runs to the barber shop window and flips the "OPEN" sign that is there. The back of it says "GONE BROOM SHOPPING." BERNIE runs off R. GIGGLES watches him go, then breathes a sigh of relief. LINDA and JAKE appear at the window above the drugstore. The noose is wrapped around JAKE'S neck.)

LINDA

Nobody's here to see the execution but the stranger? What kind of town is this? Well, I'm not waiting around anymore. That does it.

(LINDA reaches for something, and the execution siren suddenly stops.)

Jake, get up there.

(LINDA pokes JAKE in the back, and JAKE, his hands tied behind his back, steps up onto the windowsill.)

GIGGLES

Wait! What...what about a eulogy?

LINDA

A eulogy? You know, we've got an old saying here in Friendlyville, "Strangers are Stupid," and I can see where it comes from. Eulogies are for after someone dies!

GIGGLES

That's only because you never know when someone is going to die! But not if they're being executed. Don't you think it would be nice for someone to be able to hear their own eulogy?

LINDA

Well, Jake did speak when the clown died. I guess it would be OK if someone said something now that he's about to die.

JAKE

I have something I'd like to...

LINDA

(Interrupting) Shut up! Not you. *(Beat)* But who's going to give the eulogy? I don't have anything I want to say, and you're a stranger. You don't even know Jake. We could get Kelly...

JAKE

No! I don't want her to see this.

GIGGLES

I may not know Jake personally, but I've heard a lot about him. Why, when I was coming into town on the bus today, there was a man sitting next to me...a Mr. ...oh, what was his name...Anderson!

LINDA

Anderson? There was a Mr. Anderson coming into town?

GIGGLES

Yep. He said he was all excited about seeing his wife again, and he said he was glad Jake was the town florist, because he knew there was no one better to help him pick out some roses for his wife. Funny, though...he started reading his newspaper, and he got real quiet, like he was real upset about something.

LINDA

What...what section was he reading?

GIGGLES

Current Affairs.

LINDA

Ohhhhhh, crap.

(LINDA disappears from the window. There is the sound of footsteps running down the steps, and then LINDA enters from the drugstore.)

If that man shows up here, and he asks about me...you haven't seen me.

(LINDA runs off L. JAKE is still standing on the ledge.)

JAKE

Um...am I still supposed to jump now? Because I don't really intend to.

GIGGLES

Get back in the window. I'll meet you up there.

(JAKE crawls back in the window. GIGGLES runs into the drugstore. After a pause, KELLY enters from the restaurant. She looks around. Seeing no one, she sadly sits at one of the tables on the terrace and puts her head on the table. GIGGLES and JAKE, free of the noose, enter from the drugstore.)

KELLY

(Running over to them) JAKE! Jake, you're OK!

(She hugs him. Then, she turns to GIGGLES.)

KELLY, *Continued*

You didn't leave.

GIGGLES

No.

KELLY

(Hugging GIGGLES) Thank you, Giggles.

JAKE

Giggles? Giggles! Giggles the Clown! You're alive! Wait, you're not a killer zombie clown, are you?

GIGGLES

Nope. I'm just a guy with no place in the world.

JAKE

But I saw you...you were dead as a doornail!

GIGGLES

Just shears jammed into the ol' clown wig. And Bernie always has enough blood splattered on the floor of his shop to make a fake death look authentic. Nice eulogy, by the way.

JAKE

Thanks. I liked yours, too.

GIGGLES

Actually, I thought I really was going to end up dead. I heard Kelly crying above my coffin, and I honked my horn...

KELLY

But the coffin lid was stuck and I couldn't get it open. And then you and Claire came back, and you took the coffin to the cemetery, and...

JAKE

(Looking at GIGGLES) We buried you alive. Oh, Giggles, I am so sorry.

GIGGLES

Yeah, that was...not so much fun. Well, at least Kelly finally dug me up and got me out of there. And then I shed my clown costume forever and became this...Collin Giggleson.

JAKE

But Friendlyville's never going to accept a Collin Giggleson...we've got no place for you.

GIGGLES

I know. I was hoping maybe you'd have an idea of what I could do. You think you might need an assistant at the flower shop, you know, to make deliveries?

JAKE

Sorry, but if you're not about to admit that you're Giggles the Clown, I don't think I'm going to be the flower shop owner much longer. I'm wanted for execution on the grounds of body snatching. And if that body doesn't show up in that coffin, I'd best be skipping town. And since that body is you...

GIGGLES

I can just put on the clown costume and get back in there. Then you can dig me out again.

JAKE

It's not going to work. Claire will no doubt be checking your coffin every week. She'll see that you're gone, and I'll be right back at the end of a rope.

KELLY

Why don't we ask Old Man Ellison?

GIGGLES

Ellison?

KELLY

Yeah! He always seems to know what to do in situations like these. If only he was around.

GIGGLES

Well, he is around, if we really have to talk to him.

JAKE

He is?

GIGGLES

Come on, I'm tired of this. He's right there.

(GIGGLES points to ELLISON.)

JAKE

I don't see anybody.

KELLY

All I see is a newspaper.

GIGGLES

But Ellison is behind the newspaper.

KELLY

How can you be so sure?

GIGGLES

I can see his body!

JAKE

But you can't see his face. That could be anybody behind that newspaper.

KELLY

How do we know that that body even has a face? Or even a head?

GIGGLES

Quit acting ridiculous. Old Man Ellison! Come on, we know you're there. Old Man Ellison, we need you!

JAKE

Must not be him.

GIGGLES

It's him. He's always there, behind that newspaper. Ellison! Put down your paper.

(GIGGLES reaches for the newspaper.)

KELLY

Giggles, no!

JAKE

Don't touch that newspaper! We don't know what's behind it!

GIGGLES

(Paying no attention) Old Man Ellison, I know you can hear me. Ellison. ELLISON!

(GIGGLES rips the newspaper away from ELLISON. ELLISON just sits there, motionless. He is dead. GIGGLES shakes him.)

Old Man Ellison?

(ELLISON tumbles off the bench.)

Old Man Ellison! No!

KELLY

Oh no, oh no.

JAKE

(GIGGLES attends to ELLISON, listening for his heart.)

He's gone.

GIGGLES

No...he can't be.

KELLY

(She buries herself in JAKE's arms.)

What happened?

JAKE

(GIGGLES picks up the newspaper and checks it. A single newspaper page floats down from above. GIGGLES looks at it.)

The obituaries. It was his time.

GIGGLES

(GIGGLES shows the newspaper to KELLY and JAKE.)

I can't believe he's gone.

KELLY

I always just kind of assumed he would be there on that bench forever.

JAKE

But he doesn't have to die in vain.

GIGGLES

What do you mean?

KELLY

Kelly, I want you to run to your house. Take Jake with you, and get my clown costume and makeup.

GIGGLES

KELLY

You can't mean...we can't do that to Old Man Ellison!

GIGGLES

He's already dead. It's either this, or let Jake die too.

KELLY

(After a moment) Let's go, Jake. We'll be back as quick as we can.

(KELLY and JAKE hurry off L. GIGGLES kneels next to ELLISON.)

GIGGLES

I'm sorry, Old Man Ellison.

(GIGGLES puts the newspaper over ELLISON'S face.)

I think you were better at love than you gave yourself credit for. *(Looking off L)* Maybe I am, too.

(The lights dim slightly as CLAIRE floats slowly and accusingly on from R.)

CLAIRE

Someone has died.

(She approaches GIGGLES and ELLISON, kneeling over to peek beneath the newspaper.)

Old Man Ellison. It is you. You managed to drag things out for quite some time. But we all must return to that from whence we came. *(Cradling his head in her lap)* Welcome home. *(Stands)* Ah, our mysterious broom-wielding stranger. You had something to do with this.

GIGGLES

No! It wasn't my fault! He just died.

CLAIRE

We'll see what our local officer of the law and prestigious mayor have to say about that.

GIGGLES

No...please.

CLAIRE

I'm afraid the matter is out of my hands...stranger.

(She floats over to GIGGLES and puts her arms around him.)

But I do believe you will be joining Jake on death's waiting list. And soon you will find yourself in the company of the old man and the clown. *(Kisses him)* The clown...

(She kisses him again.)

Giggles. Giggles the Clown. It is you. Back from the dead.

GIGGLES

Not exactly.

CLAIRE

Murdered, entombed, and buried. And now you walk among us. *(Pause)* I think I'm in love.

GIGGLES

Claire, please...you can't tell Mayor Dinkerson or Officer Mandy.

CLAIRE

How could I deny the requests of the dead? Of course. I will tell them nothing. But tell me, Giggles...tell me what it was like.

GIGGLES

Well...it was dark, mostly. A little uncomfortable.

(CLAIRE is completely enamored.)

I got pretty impatient waiting to be dug out. Every little sound you hear down there, you think it might be a shovel. But then again, it might be a worm trying to get into your coffin. When you're faced with total darkness, total nothingness...it's weird. At first there's nothing, but then...there's everything. It's like the nothingness becomes magnified, and when it becomes greater than itself, it's...yeah, it's everything.

CLAIRE

Oh, Giggles. You're the one I've been searching for all my life. One who straddles the line between the known and the unknown. *(To herself)* "Mrs. Giggles." Or would it be "Mrs. The Clown?"

GIGGLES

Well, I don't think it can be either, actually.

CLAIRE

Why?

GIGGLES

Because I can't be Giggles the Clown anymore. Dinkerson would just have me killed again if he found out I was alive.

CLAIRE

Or worse, thrown in jail. Yes. I see what you are saying. But if you cannot be Giggles the Clown, then what can you be?

(KELLY and JAKE return from L, carrying a clown costume and a makeup kit.)

KELLY

Giggles, we've got it...Claire!

JAKE

Claire! Listen, we can explain.

CLAIRE

No explanation is necessary, Jake. I love Giggles the Clown.

GIGGLES

But I'm not going to be Giggles the Clown anymore. Or even Collin Giggleson. Don't you get it? This is the answer. This is how I'm going to stay here!

KELLY

What do you mean?

GIGGLES

I'm going to be Old Man Ellison.

JAKE

Old Man Ellison?

GIGGLES

Nobody has to know that he's gone. And they never will.

CLAIRE

Of course! Your journey to the other side has filled you with wisdom.

GIGGLES

Come on. We need to do this quick.

(The four work wordlessly to get OLD MAN ELLISON into the clown costume and basic clown makeup, including the wig and nose. Music accompanies this transition, and the act of turning ELLISON into a clown almost becomes a strange dance. When the four are finished, they gently place ELLISON into the coffin.)

KELLY

Shouldn't we say something?

JAKE

Well, I guess I should. I told Old Man Ellison that I would do his eulogy. Anyway, Old Man Ellison... *(Clears his throat)* ...well, here it goes. Old Man Ellison spent his days on a bench, right in the middle of Friendlyville. None of us really knew who he was, but we all...you know, we all knew him, if that makes any sense. Old Man Ellison...well, he was old. There was never any doubt about that. Come to think of it, I don't think Old Man Ellison ever wasn't old. But with that age came experience. Experience, and a lot of wisdom. I think Old Man Ellison existed on a higher plane than the rest of us here in Friendlyville. He was the one you would go to for advice, and he was the one you trusted with your secrets. He always had his newspaper. I think for a lot of us, that newspaper was all we ever knew. But there was a man behind that newspaper. And, well...I guess sometimes we forgot that. Old Man Ellison...I think I speak for the rest of the town when I say I promise never to forget the man behind the paper again. Rest in peace.

(The four work together to close the coffin.)

Well, I guess that's the end of it.

(DINKERSON can be heard shouting from offstage.)

DINKERSON (O.S.)

Dammit all! Confunderation!

GIGGLES

Oh no, here comes Dinkerson. Well...thank you all for your help. But it looks like I'd better take my place. Good luck.

KELLY

You too, Giggles.

JAKE

And thank you for everything.

GIGGLES

You're welcome. But remember, from now on...I'm not Giggles.

(He takes the newspaper and sits on the bench.)

CLAIRE

I love you...

(GIGGLES puts the paper up in front of his face.)

...Old Man Ellison.

(DINKERSON storms on from L.)

DINKERSON

Sweet sassy small-mouthed bassy, I looked ev'rywhere for that danged 'frig' rator. Where the hell could it have run off to? Ah checked the playground, Ah checked the train station...Ah even checked the appliance store ta' see if it went off ta' see its old friends, but I ain't seen it nowhere no-how!

KELLY

What about your kitchen?

DINKERSON

Well...I didn't think ta' look there.

(LINDA enters from L.)

LINDA

Say, has anybody seen my husband? Because he was supposed to be away from home indefinitely, which I just always assumed meant he wouldn't be coming back at all, but I heard...anyway, I checked over at with Orville Stephenson at the bus station, and...
(Seeing JAKE) ...hey! What's he doing out?

(MANDY hurries on from R.)

MANDY

Don't move a muscle, Jake Robertson. If you provide any resistance to your execution, you will be immediately executed. And what happened to the stranger that was here? He had been charged with the task of assisting Linda in keeping Jake under guard.

LINDA

You know, did anybody else think that stranger looked familiar?

DINKERSON

Aw, woman, you think ev'ryone looks familiar!

LINDA

Only the people I know! Besides, we're ALL human beings, so we're all going to look a little bit similar! Never mind. Sometimes I don't know why I even bother with you, Dinkie.

DINKERSON

Well I don't know why Ah bother with me either!

(BERNIE enters from R, sadly snipping his shears.)

BERNIE

Broom shop was closed. What kind of barber am I? I don't even have a...hey!

(He sees his broom, and runs over to grab it.)

This is MY broom, and I own it at the current time. I don't think anybody can dispute that.

GIGGLES

(Peering over his paper) Agreed.

MANDY

Linda Anderson, have you the noose ready for removal of the prisoner from our world?

LINDA

Should still be ready to go.

(She starts to head up to her apartment.)

KELLY

Wait!

(LINDA stops.)

MANDY

Kelly Neilson, your opposition to approved executions is not going unnoticed.

KELLY

But we can't kill Jake. He's innocent!

DINKERSON

That was the wrong envelope!

JAKE

But I am!

LINDA

Like heck you are!

GIGGLES

(Peering over his newspaper) Maybe we just missed Giggles' body when we looked in there the first time.

DINKERSON

Missed it?

LINDA

That's ridiculous!

MANDY

A trained officer of the law would not miss a body in its coffin.

CLAIRE

But...sometimes the dead can be difficult to fully grasp with our earthly minds. Those who have passed on to another world are not always readily apparent.

GIGGLES

It's worth a look.

DINKERSON

Oh, fer Jake's sake! Awright, take a look.

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes